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"WHAT A DELIGHTFUL RIDE WE HAD, AGNITA, HADN'T WE?" SHE SAID, HOLDING UP THE ROSE BEFORE HER.

HE LOVES ME NOT;

Or, A CRUEL FALSEHOOD.

BY LILLIAN LOVEJOY.

CHAPTER I.

A JEALOUS COUSIN.

THE library at Thornhill looked very snug

and comfortable on the evening our story begins. It was about six o'clock; a bright fire blazed on the hearth, and the flickering flames lighted up the quaintly-furnished room with their fitful gleams shining brightly on the forms of Ina Thornhill and her cousin, Agnita Elverson, who were whiling away the hour before dinner-time chatting in the half dusk apartment.

Agnita Elverson was a tall, finely-formed

woman of two or three and thirty, though she looked younger, and gave herself out to be only seven and twenty.

As she stood, leaning her white arm on the marble mantelpiece, her trailing black velvet robe showing off her splendid figure to perfection, and her large dark eyes gazing thoughtfully on the fire, a handsomer or more graceful presence could scarcely have been imagined. No one looking at her perfect features and clear olive complexion would have believed her to have passed her twenty-fifth year at the outside.

Ina Thornhill, her cousin, and the daughter of the house, formed a striking contrast to the queenly beauty before her.

Albeit, in her own way, she, too, was very lovely to look upon, though she appeared but a mere child as she sat on the thick Turkish hearthrug at Agnita's feet, looking up with a smile on her rosy lips into the other's face, her fair hair drawn off her delicate pink and white face, and gathered up simply behind into a massive knot; her deep violet eyes shining clear and bright as two stars as she gazed at the dark, handsome face before her, while in her little hands she held a white rose that she could not succeed in arranging to her satisfaction in the waist-belt of her white cashmere dress.

"What a delightful ride we had, Agnita, hadn't we?" she said, holding up the rose before her as if to admire its beauties all the more.

"Yes; at least *you* seemed to enjoy it, Ina," was the reply, given in rather a sarcastic tone, while the big black eyes cast a sidelong glance at the delicate little being on the hearthrug, which caused the blood to mount to her cheeks uncomfortably.

"But didn't *you* enjoy it, too, Agnita?" she said, in a faltering voice.

"Well, one gets tired of Mr. Thynne's company after an hour or two, Ina; and really Peter Lawson is unendurable!"

"Unendurable! Oh, Agnita, have pity on the poor man. He positively adores you; and—"

"And I suppose you think because he adores me, and has so many thousands a year, and I am Agnita Elverson, with so many cents, I ought to take his attentions thankfully—is that it?" she interrupted, firing up.

"Agnita, what do you mean?" cried Ina, almost frightened at Agnita's sarcastic tone. "I was only joking."

"Ah, yes; of course. Excuse me, Ina; I am very foolish," replied Agnita, but in the same tone. "You forget the difference of our positions; you often do. Where did you get that rose, child? Who gave it to you? You know your father expects me (who am so much the elder, as he often remarks) to look after

you when he is not by; so confess, who gave you the flower?"

And she snatched it mischievously from Ina's hand, so that the stem snapped off close to the blossom.

"Oh, Agnita! you've spoiled it!" she cried, reproachfully.

"Tut! nonsense, child! Mr. Beauchamp will give you another, I dare say." And she flung the broken rose into Ina's lap. "I saw him give it to you just as he rode up, Ina!"

"Yes, Mr. Beauchamp gave it to me," she replied, with a blush.

Agnita turned her face toward her cousin, and there was a gleam of malice and dislike in the glance she shot from her large dark eyes that ill became her beautiful face and gave it an almost sinister expression.

"Mr. Beauchamp," she said, coldly, "seems to pay attention to one girl after another without anything coming of it. When you were at school the year before last, Ina, he was madly in love with Edith Hope; last year, in Paris, I was told that he was devoted to some beautiful Swede; and there was a time when—but that's a secret."

And she smiled disagreeably.

"Mr. Beauchamp is a favorite in society, Agnita, I know," replied Ina, thoughtfully; "but I do not believe he is so fickle as you make out. He is too true-hearted and noble to—"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Agnita; "that is because you are just now the object of his attentions. You are like the rest, Ina; and until he throws you over you'll not hear a word against him. You are wasting your love on him, Ina. He will never marry you!" she added, vehemently.

"You are going a little too fast, Agnita," replied Ina, coldly, as she rose from her seat before the fire. "Probably no such idea has entered Mr. Beauchamp's head, any more than it has mine; so we need not trouble ourselves to discuss the matter. Hark! there is the dinner-bell, and I hear papa crossing the hall! Will you go to the dining-room? I will follow you as soon as I have put my poor rose in water."

And Ina sighed involuntarily.

"She loves him! she loves him!" muttered Agnita, as with a composed face, though with an angry heart, she swept majestically from the room across the hall to the dining-room. "I hate her! I have tried so long and so patiently to win his love these three years; and—and, except just at first, he never has seemed to care 'or me a pin! Yet at first I thought I should win him as easily as others. What did he see in me that changed him? And now she has come, and he is getting to care for her; I see it all plainly enough!"

Agnita entered the dining-room as the last words passed through her mind; and when she saw Mr. Thornhill standing on the rug before the fire, her face changed. A soft smile parted her lips, and the frown left her brow.

"Ah, sir," she said, gayly, "I fear we have kept you waiting? Ina will be here in a moment. She is just putting some flowers in water."

"She might have waited to do that till afterward," replied Mr. Thornhill. "I like punctuality. I'm afraid Madame Laforce didn't teach punctuality at Ina's school—eh, my dear? You're always punctuality itself—just as my poor dear sister was! You must try and drum it into Ina; you being so much the elder, you know, she won't mind your telling her of these little things. Ah! here she is! Late again, Ina!"

"Forgive me, papa, darling!" she answered, lightly kissing his good-tempered, jovial face, and smoothing the gray hair from his broad forehead. "Only half a minute to-day, papa; so Ina's improved since last time."

"So you have, my dear—so you have!" he replied, good-naturedly. "Now, take your dinner, and tell me all you've been doing to-day."

And while Ina and her father chatted on, Agnita sat by with a thoughtful look on her face, taking little heed of the conversation, and no part in it, till Mr. Beauchamp's name was mentioned. Then she looked keenly at Ina.

"A fine fellow!—a very fine fellow! I remember his coming of age, twelve years ago. Three years after, to a day—"

And then Mr. Thornhill stopped short. A look of pain passed over his face, that in a moment transformed its expression, his head sinking on his breast, and becoming silent.

Evidently some very tender chord had been struck—some very sad remembrance had been awakened by the mention of Mr. Beauchamp's coming of age.

"Try this claret, uncle," said Agnita, after a moment's pause. "It's your favorite brand. Here, Hewitt!"

And she signed to the butler to fill his master's glass; while Ina looked on in puzzled distress.

Mr. Thornhill roused himself from his reverie, with a deep sigh, and looked sadly, as, "Ina, my poor little girl!" he muttered.

"Darling papa, what is it?" cried Ina, half-terrified, in spite of a warning gesture from Agnita.

"There, there! we will not think of it any more. Heaven help us all! Don't look frightened, Ina. I was wrong to forget myself in thinking of the past. Agnita, my dear, we must think of giving a little dance this winter.

It will cheer us all up; and now that Ina is at home for good, we must try and be a little more sprightly and gay."

A strange vindictive look came into Agnita's eyes. She had lived for five years at Thornhill, and her uncle had never thought of giving a ball for *her*.

"You won't care so much for it, I dare say, Agnita," he went on. "You must have had enough of such things in your younger days; though certainly"—and he looked at her with a tinge of surprise in his face—"you look as young as any of them yet, my dear; but to Ina it will be quite a novelty."

"And I shall enjoy it, too, uncle. I am foolish enough to enjoy dancing still," she replied, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"And I could fancy you were once a good dancer," replied the old man, critically; "though, for my part, I think a tiny creature like Ina looks better in a ball-room than a woman of your height, my dear."

Agnita smiled almost scornfully, and thought of the days, long passed now, when she had been considered the best dancer in the society her father, Gerard Elverson, the artist, frequented; and when, in many a ball-room, a crowd would assemble to see her—and then she dismissed the remembrance of her early life with an angry sigh.

She was the daughter and only child of Mr. Thornhill's sister, who in her early youth had made a runaway match with a young and penniless artist. Her early years had been passed abroad in a kind of Bohemian society, of which her mother's relations had but vague ideas, albeit they utterly condemned the match she had made.

As time passed on, and Gerard Elverson, a rising painter then, died, Agnita and her mother had quitted the society of artists and actors, which in Paris, they had principally frequented, and returning from abroad, had mixed with those who had known Mrs. Elverson in her youth, and who, now that her husband was no more, did not scruple to admit her again into their society.

"It's a wonder to me that Agnita does not marry," Mrs. Elverson would say, with a sigh, "so handsome and clever as she is, and the attention that is paid her; but she doesn't care to leave me, the dear child! She is so affectionate, so devoted to me."

But though, perhaps, Agnita Elverson did care more for her mother than for any one else in the world, it was not love for her that kept her single. It was simply a fatality that had prevented her securing any one of the rich *partis* she had set herself to captivate; an inability entirely to hide her selfish, grasping nature; a certain coldness and hardness in her character, which would crop up now and again,

and which had on more than one occasion driven from her side the man she had determined should be her husband.

As years passed on, and she felt youth slipping away, and knew that, however young she might look and however beautiful she might be, time would inevitably, sooner or later, rob her of her charms, she grew almost desperate. She knew that at her mother's death she would be left almost without means, and that her uncle's house would be the only home open to her.

She dreaded a country life. She shuddered as she thought of its dullness; of the long, lonely winter evenings, and the scarcely less weary summer days; of the stupidity and stiffness of country society, and the monotony of existence miles away from any large and fashionable resort.

Yet, when her mother died, she found herself obliged to accept the shelter Mr. Thornhill did not delay to offer her, and coldly bidding adieu to the acquaintances who did not even deign to offer to save her from such a fate, and turning her back on the lovers and admirers who seemed to have forgotten her in her trouble, five years before our story commences, Agnita Elverson found herself an inmate of Thornhill.

CHAPTER II.

HIS BETTER CHOICE.

PERHAPS, till she met Rupert Beauchamp, Agnita's heart had remained untouched. She had fancied herself in love once or twice, years before; but the fancy had left her before many months had gone by, and she had said adieu to the man to whom for a brief while she imagined she had given her love, without a sigh of regret.

Now the case was altered. She had flirted with many, but from the first moment she met Mr. Beauchamp her heart had been touched, and, as far as she could love, she loved him, and strove to win his love in return.

At first, Mr. Beauchamp had seemed attracted to her. He was young, rich, and well-connected, and could marry to please his fancy, without looking for money with his wife.

Agnita was beautiful, of good family (on her mother's side, at least), and holding, as her uncle's adopted child, an excellent position in society.

What more suitable than a marriage between the two? And for a time every one watched the course of events with interest, and prophesied that Beauchamp Lodge would soon have a mistress.

Agnita did her best to give color to these reports, and gave Rupert Beauchamp only too plainly to see that his society was pleasing to

her, and that she almost considered him her property. Perhaps it was this, or the reports of his engagement to her that were rife, or maybe the other reports that were passed from acquaintance to acquaintance, till they at length reached him, that alarmed him.

At any rate, there was a sudden cessation of his visits at Thornhill; a curious constraint and coldness in his manner to Agnita; and the neighborhood was startled one morning by learning that the Lodge was shut up, and that its master had gone abroad for some months.

How would Miss Elverson take it? thought every one. But Miss Elverson was impassible. She seemed to care nothing whatever for Mr. Beauchamp's departure. She spoke of it calmly, even coldly. Her smile was as bright and her laugh as ringing as ever.

The community were mystified, and some began to fancy that Miss Elverson had refused him after leading him on to believe she would marry him.

Had the outer world been allowed a view of Agnita in the solitude and seclusion of her own apartment, their opinion would rapidly have undergone a change.

Proudly as Agnita bore herself in public, in private she writhed and groaned under her disappointment, and shed bitter, scalding tears as she thought of how she had failed—failed when everything depended on her success—to win the heart of the one man she had ever loved.

Selfish as her nature and her love were, she suffered terribly; but all hope had not left her. Mr. Beauchamp was to be away a few months only—a year, perhaps; then he would return, and she would regain her lost influence over him.

How had she lost it? What had she done to change his first impressions of her?

Long and sadly she meditated on these questions, but failed to perceive the causes that had estranged Rupert Beauchamp from her, and caused him to modify completely the first impression she had made on him.

He had been greatly taken with her grand and queenly style of beauty the first day he saw her. Surely her mind would correspond with her face! Surely none but noble sentiments could find place in the heart of such a magnificent-looking woman! Surely those soft velvety black eyes, those delicately-curved lips, could never belong to one whose soul was not filled with noble aspirations and gentle, womanly affections! Such were then his inward thoughts.

But before long Rupert learnt that those lovely eyes could cast lightning flashes of anger and irony; that the beautiful lips could curve with scorn and contempt; that the mind of this beautiful woman, whom he had at first regarded almost as a goddess, contained worldly

thoughts, sordid ideas, unworthy motives; that selfishness was its predominating sentiment, and vanity and love of ease its ruling passions; and sorrow-stricken and disgusted at the discovery, Rupert suddenly awoke to a sense of what the world was saying, and felt that as far as in him lay he must give the lie to the reports that had been spread about him and Agnita Elverson.

In one particular, however, Rupert was deceived, and had judged Agnita wrongly. He fancied that she did not love him, and that she was leading him on to marry her from other motives.

In this he was completely mistaken. Possibly Agnita would have married him (however much in after years she might have regretted it) had he been a penniless man instead of one of the richest in the country at the moment.

But he left her, and instead of staying away one year, as he at first intended, with the exception of a short visit to the Lodge, when, as it happened, Mr. Thornhill and Agnita were from home, it was two years before he returned.

Six months after his return, Ina Thornhill came home for good, and Rupert Beauchamp's fate was quickly decided. He resolved that Ina should be his wife.

There was no mistaking the pure innocent soul that looked at him through those violet eyes; the smile that greeted him on those rosy lips came from the heart as truly as the blush that spread itself over the oval cheek of the fair girl as she gave him her hand.

Time did not cause him to change his opinion of her. Her mind was as beautiful as her person; her heart was full of love and charity and innocence. No hard, selfish, worldly feelings found a shelter there.

"What a contrast between the two!" he thought, as he rode away from Thornhill that day after the ride they had taken together. "Both so beautiful, yet in character and disposition how dissimilar! My white rose—my pure white rose! Oh, how thankful I am I knew you in time! What a happy man I shall be if I can win your love! And I think I shall—I think I may succeed."

He rode on thoughtfully, an anxious expression on his handsome face.

"I don't know how she manages to get on so well with Miss Elverson; though, for the matter of that, Ina is so sweet and good she would get on with any one. I hope she will not imbibe any of her cousin's worldly ideas." And he pulled his black mustache uneasily.

"A woman of that age, and of that force of character, could so easily gain an influence over an inexperienced girl. If Mr. Thornhill will only consent, I will not let the grass grow under my feet—we must be married soon.

But I was forgetting I have not yet asked Ina, and she may say 'No.'"

And he fell for a time into one of those unreasoning fits of despondency, such as are often the portion of over-anxious lovers.

"I don't think I can be mistaken," he thought, his face clearing up as he turned in at the gates of the Lodge. "Ina would not have looked as she did when she took my rose—she would not have promised to keep the flower in remembrance of our ride if—if I had been quite indifferent to her. How lovely she is!—just like her mother, whose death I can remember so well, sad and sudden as it was. The squire has never been the same man since, and never mentions his wife even now. Poor thing! I wonder what she died of? Why here's Thynne! I thought he'd gone home long ago; he was rector here when Ina's mother died; I dare say he knows all about it. Hallo, Thynne; glad to see you. Come in and dine with me, won't you?"

"Thanks, Beauchamp; I want a chat with you on various matters," replied the rector, a fine-looking middle-aged man. "I'll come in with pleasure. We had a nice party this afternoon, hadn't we? Miss Elverson is a first rate rider."

"Very good; so is Miss Thornhill. Come in, Thynne, and let James take your horses to the stables. It's good of you to take compassion on me in my solitude."

At dinner the two men were more silent than might have been expected, considering that Mr. Thynne had announced that he had several matters to discuss with his friend; but when the servants had left the room, and the wine was placed on the table, the conversation began to flow more freely.

"Have you noticed," said Mr. Thynne, drawing his chair nearer to Rupert's, and speaking in a lower tone, "how much our friend Thornhill has altered in the last year, Beauchamp—particularly during the last six months?"

Rupert looked up in surprise.

"Now you mention it," he replied, "it does strike me that the squire has grown much older-looking and less hearty. I remember I thought him altered when I came home some months ago; but then I had not seen him for two years, and put down the change to the effects of time rather than illness."

"But he is ill. I hinted as much to Miss Elverson; but it was evidently a new idea to her, and Miss Ina is too much of a child still to notice signs of ill-health. Miss Elverson seemed a good deal startled at the idea, though I wonder what would be her position if the squire died, Beauchamp? I suppose he has provided for her in his will."

"I should think so. She has been quite like

a daughter to him in past years," replied Rupert. "But you don't think the squire is in any danger, surely, Thynne?"

The rector looked grave.

"He's been gradually changing these last fourteen years—ever since his wife died, in fact. He suffers, I know, and I fear the disease is gaining ground."

"What did Mrs. Thornhill die of?" asked Rupert, eagerly, without allowing the rector to finish his sentence.

Mr. Thynne looked startled.

"Has any one been—have you heard any remarks made about her death?" he asked.

"No; but I remember the event was very sudden. I was quite a young fellow then, and away from home; but it has always seemed to me that there was something strange about it—some—"

"Some gossip and talk, eh? Well, you are right—there was; but besides myself and old Doctor Arkwright, who died some years ago, I don't believe any one knows the rights of the story."

"Then there was a mystery about it?" cried Rupert.

"Yes. Poor Thornhill! poor little Ina! But I must say no more, Beauchamp; and, except to you, I would not have said even so much as I have. My lips are sealed on the subject. Her death was a terrible blow to the squire, and her loss irreparable. It changed him for many years entirely."

"And you cannot tell me the particulars?" said Rupert.

The rector shook his head.

"I promised never to mention them," he replied. "Perhaps I was wrong; but, unless for some very urgent reason, nothing would tempt me to break that promise, especially during poor Thornhill's lifetime."

"But the secret may concern me more deeply than you imagine," said Rupert, eagerly.

"How so?" said the rector, uneasily.

"Because of Ina. Don't you see she is all the world to me, Thynne? Some day, I trust—"

"Ina!" said the rector, growing pale, while the light faded suddenly out of his deep-set gray eyes.

"Yes—Ina; I love her, and if I can but win her love, I hope to make her my wife. So this matter concerns me more than most people," replied Rupert, without noticing the strange look on the rector's face.

"I always thought," he said, in an agitated voice, "that it was Miss Elverson you—you admired, Beauchamp?"

"Miss Elverson! Ah, Thynne, years ago I nearly made a grand mistake there; how great I had never realized till I saw Ina, and contrasted the two cousins—Ina all purity and simplicity, and Agnita selfish and worldly."

"You are right," sighed Mr. Thynne, recovering himself; "the difference is marked enough. Well, if you win Miss Thornhill you will be a happy man—very, very happy!" And he sighed deeply.

"As for our friend Thornhill—" he resumed, after a pause; but just then the door opened, and the servant announced the squire.

"Surprised to see me at this hour, Rupert, I dare say," he said, sinking into a chair. "How do you do, Thynne? Glad to see you. The fact is, Rupert, I felt so restless and fidgety this evening that I could not stay at home, so as soon as the girls—or rather Ina, for Agnita is up still—went off to bed, I ordered Firefly and rode over to have a chat with you. I feel as if sleep were out of the question this evening."

And the squire passed his hand wearily over his brow and shivered slightly.

For the first time, Rupert noticed how worn and haggard his usually jovial face had become.

"I get these nervous fancies and feelings more strongly than ever now, Thynne," he said, in a low voice. "You know to what I allude?"

"Yes, yes," replied the rector, soothingly; "but you must not give way to them, Thornhill."

"I don't, at least, I try not to," he replied; "but I can't help thinking both of the past and the future. Poor little Ina!"

And he said the last words in an undertone, yet they reached Rupert's ears, and caused him to wonder at their meaning.

There was silence for a moment or two. Then the squire roused himself.

"I declare I put you both in the blues by my complaining and grumbling! I don't know what's come over me. I must call on Doctor Harris, I declare, if I get many more of these grumpy fits."

"Do, sir; he'll cure you fast enough," replied Rupert.

But the squire sighed again, and throughout the evening it was plain that his attempts at hilarity were forced.

CHAPTER III.

A RICH SUITOR.

THE winter passed away rapidly, and spring once more gladdened the face of the earth. The hedges were bright with flowers, and the meadows blue with violets. The birds sung gayly in the branches and seemed to rejoice that the frost and snow had taken flight, and the warm, bright sun shone on them again as they caroled their songs in the woods.

Thornhill, surrounded by magnificent elms and maples looked its best in spring, and Ina prepared to enjoy with all her heart the months that were coming. One thing alone troubled

her, and that was the state of her father's health.

Since the evening Mr. Thornhill had passed in early winter with Rupert and Mr. Thynne at the Lodge his ailments had increased—he seemed gradually fading out of life; and daily the gray hair grew whiter and thinner; the once round, healthy cheek, hollower; the dark eyes more sunken and heavy-looking.

One by one the squire's active occupations and habits were given up. First his riding; then his habit of rambling over the estate; even his drives were shortened; and, at length, for days at a time, he would scarcely move out of doors.

"Ah, my dear," he would say, when Ina tried to coax him back to his old habits; "I am growing an old man now; a chair by the fireside suits me better than the saddle now; and a pair of soft slippers are more comfortable to my poor old feet than boots and gaiters. Take a ride with Agnita, my dear. I dare say Beauchamp will accompany you; but don't ask me to leave my arm-chair, love. I begin to think it's the only place I'm really fit for now."

And so Ina would turn away with a sad face and tearful eyes, scarcely liking to open her heart to the vague dread that knocked for admittance there, and wishing that her father would let her remain with him to keep him company in his solitude. But this he steadily refused to let her do, and always made her go out and enjoy herself without troubling her little head about his laziness, as he termed it.

Agnita Elverson, too, looked grave and troubled as she observed the increasing feebleness of her uncle; but her regret was of a different stamp to Ina's. What would become of her if he died? Had he provided for her? What would her position be after his death? Such were the thoughts and fears that passed through her mind as the ever-increasing change in Mr. Thornhill's appearance made her think of the future.

The past winter had been a trying one to Agnita. Mr. Beauchamp had been a constant visitor at Thornhill, and his attentions to Ina and neglect of herself wounded and irritated her almost beyond endurance.

She tried not to love him—nay, she tried to hate him, but she could not.

When in his presence she seemed to feel more and more that with him life might have been so happy, that there would have been something beyond wealth, and show, and position to live for had she been his wife—that she could almost have borne poverty with him beside her. Why had she been unable to gain his love when she had tried so hard for it? Why should she have failed so utterly? Was she not yet beautiful—ay, as beautiful as she

had been ten years earlier, when half the world—her world, that is—were at her feet?

Alas! she could not comprehend that Rupert Beauchamp looked deeper than mere beauty in his choice of a wife, and that it was her mind and disposition he had weighed in the balance and found wanting.

As to Ina, Agnita had never loved her, and now she hated her. At first she had looked on her as a foolish, petted, pretty child, too insignificant, in spite of her prettiness, to come in her way. But, behold! she had now taken from her the only man she valued, and bitterly did Agnita resent it.

"To think of his preferring a child like that—a baby-faced, milk-and-water school-girl—to me!" she thought, as she surveyed herself in the glass, her color rising, and her eyes flashing with indignation. "She is an infant—a veritable infant—without a bit of *savoir faire* or knowledge of the world. She has not a quarter of my cleverness, nor one-half my good looks. She can do nothing. She has no accomplishments worth mentioning. What can he see in her, I wonder?"

Angry jealousy filled her heart as she watched Rupert Beauchamp, and marked his growing devotion to Ina. She would clench her white hands and bite her scarlet lips to keep down the sarcastic words which would rise to her lips when she marked his attentions to her, or the sweet smile and blush with which Ina received them.

She was not always able, however, to control her feelings, and many a harsh word, many a sneering remark and cutting speech had Ina to put up with from her cousin, wondering all the while what had changed her so, and altered the kind though patronizing manner, with which she had formerly treated her, so sadly.

"Have I annoyed you Agnita in any way?" she asked sweetly, after Agnita had treated her to an unusually bitter tirade. "You used not to find me so difficult to get on with, and I have never knowingly done anything to hurt you. What is it, dear?"

And Agnita would answer by a harsh, sarcastic laugh, and turn away without deigning to reply to her gentle expostulation.

In the neighborhood of Mr. Thornhill stood Rocklands, the country seat of Peter Lawson a rich man and the son of a successful iron miner. Lawson's father had worked as a laborer in his younger days, and by sheer industry and ability had raised himself in the social scale, done wonders for the thousands he employed, opened a park for the public of his native place, and at the age of seventy had died a well-known, much-respected man.

His son Peter succeeded him in his early days. He, too, could remember going dayly to work

at a factory; but as his father rose in life his children were sent to school, and Peter's education, begun in a small day-school, finished at a University, and at the age of forty he succeeded his father as owner of Rocklands and twenty thousand a year.

He was a curious man, was Peter Lawson, and spite of a far better education, much the inferior of his father.

The latter had been one of Nature's noblemen, had gained his position and wealth bravely and honestly, employed them munificently, and been esteemed by all who knew him.

With Peter, however, it was far different. He valued money for its own sake, not for the good he could do with it; was mean, shift, and cunning; a hard master, a grasping landowner, yet denying himself nothing in the way of personal luxuries and comforts.

In his early days he had married a woman in the lower ranks of life, without education or refinement. Their life together had been miserable, and when death ended it, Peter Lawson had scarcely a regret for the loss of his wife. The loss, indeed, was a relief to him. He shut up his house in town, sold another he had at Long Branch—the late Mrs. Lawson's favorite place of abode; and when his year of widowhood had expired, settled down at Rocklands which he at once began to alter and improve according to his own ideas of beauty.

He had not been many months at Rocklands before he met Agnita Elverson at a neighbor's and at once decided that she was a fit person to become Mrs. Peter Lawson, worthy to grace the head of his table, and be mistress of Rocklands.

He had twenty thousand a year, and so had little doubt that if he offered his title and wealth, to say nothing of his heart, to Miss Elverson, she would accept them without hesitation, and only waited to make his proposal till the usual forms of courtship which the world thought necessary should be gone through.

But Agnita was not nearly so easily to be won as he imagined, and he was dismayed to find how coldly his advances were received by her. At first she hardly deigned to notice him, and appeared to avoid his society; but this neglect piqued Peter, and made him more anxious than ever to succeed in his suit. It was a new sensation for him to find himself rebuffed and treated coldly, and it increased his respect and admiration for Agnita a thousand-fold.

"By Jove!" he thought, "there are very few girls, and still fewer women, who would let twenty thousand a year slip through their fingers, let alone the chance of becoming my lady! Miss Elverson is a proud woman; I'm glad of it; she'll know how to keep up her position

and mine when she's my wife. I don't think I ever saw a woman I admired so much. By Jove! when she got a bit angry with me the other evening, and flashed those eyes of hers on me, I felt a bit frightened, just as I used to feel when I was a boy, and the overseer— But bah! what makes me think of those days, I wonder? Perhaps it's because she thinks of them she's so haughty with me; but I fancy Rocklands and twenty thousand a year ought to be enough to make her forget them, as she undoubtedly will in time."

But, strange to state, with all his undoubted worldly advantages, Mr. Peter Lawson was anything but attractive to Agnita; and even the incense he burnt at her shrine, and the plentiful libations of flattery he poured out before her, almost failed to rouse her vanity and stimulate her to treat him with even ordinary graciousness.

Therefore, when she suddenly changed her manner toward him (which she did during the winter), and instead of treating him with coldness and reserve, beamed on him with satisfaction and delight whenever he approached her, Peter Lawson felt tolerably sure that his luck would in the end prove successful, and only waited for a fitting opportunity of declaring his love.

The opportunity soon was made, and the day after a dinner-party at Judge Elwes's, their neighbor, and when Agnita, though inwardly boiling with jealousy and rage as she glanced at Rupert and Ina across the table, had made herself even more agreeable and fascinating than usual toward him, he rode over to beg Mr. and Miss Thornhill and Miss Elverson to lunch with him next day, and see the improvements that had been made in his house and gardens.

"Mr. Beauchamp and Mr. Thynne have promised to come," he added, with a glance at Ina that maddened Agnita. "So we shall be quite a comfortable family party, squire—ha! ha! You'll favor me, Miss Elverson—Miss Thornhill, won't you?"

"I shall be delighted," replied Agnita, with a fascinating smile. "So will Ina, under the circumstances (and she looked archly at Mr. Lawson, who responded by a knowing chuckle,) I am sure."

And so it was settled, and as he rose to take his leave:

"I've other improvements in my mind," he said, in a low voice, "but before I begin them I must know if they have your approval, if not, I shall drop them."

And pressing Agnita's hand, he left the house.

She turned pale as she watched him ride down the avenue.

Was this little, under-bred, purse-proud man

to be her lord and master—her companion for life?

She almost shuddered for a moment, and then her face recovered its usual haughty look. At any rate she would be rich, and would turn her husband round her fingers at will.

"He is devoted to me; he would have no will but mine," she thought, "and he—Rupert—shall never know that—that—"

What are you thinking of, Agnita?" said Mr. Thornhill, coming up to her at that moment. "You've made another conquest, my dear, at the eleventh hour. Mr. Lawson is evidently quite in earnest, Agnita. Have you made up your mind what to say to him when it comes to the point?"

Agnita looked at her uncle curiously.

"Would it please you if I married him?" she said, oddly.

"Nay, my dear; that is not the question. It would be an excellent match, and you are not young, Agnita. You must remember that you are thirty—"

"Yes, yes; don't speak upon such a delicate matter, uncle. I'm all the more suited to Mr. Peter Lawson, who must be fifty, if he's a day; and I ought to be thankful to have such a chance at my age. I shall probably take him, uncle, unless—"

And she stopped.

"Think it well over at once, my dear," replied Mr. Thornhill, rather surprised at the tone in which she spoke. "You would always have a home with Ina, you know, and I have left you something in my will. Don't marry in haste."

"In haste, at *my* age?" she said, bitterly.

"At *any* age," replied the squire, gravely.

"But certainly you are old enough to judge for yourself, Agnita."

"Of course!" she replied, coldly. "Ah! here is Mr. Beauchamp, come to see if we are going to Rocklands. Not a word of this to him, or any one else, I beg, uncle!" she added, hurriedly.

"My dear Agnita, of course not!" replied Mr. Thornhill, in surprise. "Even to Beauchamp I should not think of mentioning it."

She bowed her head silently; and as Rupert entered the hall she walked silently up-stairs into her room, where for the next two hours she paced up and down in deep thought.

"I will try!" she muttered, with a sigh, at length. "It is a last resource—my last card! I will try! Perhaps he is like other men, and I shall conquer."

So saying, Agnita smoothed her ruffled hair, arranged her dress carefully, and, without a cloud on her beautiful brow, went down-stairs, to the drawing room, where Ina, Rupert, and her uncle were taking tea.

CHAPTER IV.

WILL SHE ACCEPT HIM?

AT twelve o'clock next day the party started for Rocklands, being joined first by Rupert and Mr. Thynne, who rode up just as they were mounting their horses and preparing to set out on their way.

Agnita, who was looking her very best in her dark riding-habit, that fitted her to perfection, was already mounted. Her face clouded as she saw Rupert Beauchamp get off his horse, and hurry to assist Ina and place her on her steed.

Then Mr. Thornhill mounted his, and the party moved off, Ina and Rupert side by side, she falling into the rear with her uncle and Mr. Thynne.

A half-sad, half-tender smile was on the rector's face as he glanced at the couple before them. He was no longer a young man, but in the few short months that Ina had been at Thornhill he had learned that it was not yet too late for him to love. He loved Ina with all the true devotion of a noble heart, though hopelessly, perhaps, now, for he saw how it was with her and Rupert Beauchamp. Nevertheless, no bitterness of spirit found place within him.

As he watched her riding along, gay and happy, by Rupert's side, although he felt that the love that had come to him so late in life was a love doomed to be unrequited, and that Ina could never be more to him than she was at that moment, Agnita read his thoughts with her usual quickness of perception.

"What! he, too?" she thought. "What is it they all see in her?"

And her vanity was hurt sorely when she remembered that, at any rate, Mr. Thynne had never shown the smallest inclination to become *her* slave.

After a ride of three or four miles, they entered the park that surrounded Rocklands. It had many natural beauties and advantages of hill and dell, and the turf was soft and green; but it wanted the fine old trees that were the ornament of Thornhill, and the groups of newly-planted evergreens, surrounded by railings to keep the cattle from injuring them, gave an appearance of newness, almost bareness, to the domain.

The first sight of the great white stone mansion that the elder Mr. Lawson had built, surrounded though it was by lovely gardens, increased the impression. The house was far more like a magnificent town villa than an old family residence, and a certain uncomfortable air of coldness and nakedness pervaded it.

"It will be an improvement when the trees grow up a bit," said Mr. Thornhill. "Mr. Lawson is wise though. That plantation of firs there, when they are well grown, will keep off

the north wind. He has planted them judiciously; but at present the place must be cold in winter."

"Too well built and warmed for that, I should fancy," replied Agnita, in a hard tone. "He entertained me for half an hour the other evening by a description of the warm-water pipes and hot-air pipes he had laid down all through the house, and even in the attics and stables, I believe. Dear me! what a range of greenhouses!—a perfect sight of glass! These are recent improvements."

And she laughed almost sneeringly. Mr. Thynne looked at her in surprise.

"Mr. Lawson has a taste for flowers, I believe. Ah, here he is coming to meet us!"

"Miss Elverson—Miss Thornhill, delighted to have the honor! Let me assist you."

And he sprung forward to lift Agnita from her horse; but she dismounted agilely without his assistance, drawing herself away from him as if she dreaded his touch, though her voice was soft and caressing as she replied to his greeting and followed him into the house.

It was a splendid mansion, superbly furnished; and as Agnita's eye wandered over the costly surroundings, her color rose and her heart beat fast.

Lunch was soon announced, and was a sumptuous one—almost too sumptuous for the occasion; and the table glittered with silver, and was loaded with hot-house fruits and rare flowers, while a crowd of noiseless domestics ministered to the wants of the guests.

After the meal was over, their host rose, and asked if the ladies would favor him by taking a look at the improvements he had been making in the garden and grounds; and giving his arm to Agnita, he led the way through the drawing-room, and across the velvet-turfed lawn before it, toward the conservatories.

The gardens were splendid, and the grounds tastefully arranged. The views from them were extended and very beautiful, and all the party were loud in their praises of Mr. Lawson's taste and skill as a landscape gardener; Mr. Thynne declaring that the place was quite transformed since he visited it, and Ina remarking that she should never be at a loss for enjoyment if she had such magnificent orchid houses and ferneries to look after.

"May I go through the fern-houses again, Mr. Lawson?" she said.

"I shall be only too honored," he replied, really gratified at her delight at his flowers.

"Perhaps Mr. Beauchamp would accompany me?"

"Yes; I will escort you, Miss Thornhill," said Rupert, eagerly, and casting a glance at Ina that made Agnita turn pale with jealousy.

"He is glad to get her to himself; he did not even ask me to accompany them," she thought, as she looked after him, noting how

delighted he seemed to have Ina under his charge.

She involuntarily made a step forward as if to follow him, when Mr. Lawson laid his hand on her arm.

"I want you to come and see my tennis-ground, Miss Elverson—I know you are fond of the game—and to give me your opinion on some further changes I think of making."

"My dear sir, with such taste as yours, what can my poor little opinion be worth to you?" she replied, gayly.

He looked at her with profound admiration in his glance.

"Everything; far more than you suspect, Miss Elverson," he replied, his voice trembling with agitation. "See, your father and the rector are deep in a theological controversy"—and he pointed to Mr. Thynne and the squire, who were standing at some little distance away on the lawn, talking earnestly. "Don't let us disturb them. Let me have you to myself for a moment, as Mr. Beauchamp has your cousin; for I want to speak to you seriously."

"Indeed!" replied Agnita, with an air of puzzled surprise, though she felt a strange thrill of half fear, half gratified vanity in her heart, and knew well what was to follow.

"What. You mean to say you don't know that it was because I wanted to speak to you I asked you all over to-day?" he replied.

"But you see me whenever you come to Thornhill," she answered, with a little laugh.

"Ay, but not alone, as we are now," he answered, leading her into a shady walk. "Either the squire or your cousin or her admirer, Beauchamp, is with you, and I can't speak there—Agnita."

She looked up into his face, and then her eyes were lowered to the ground, with a blush.

Never before had she looked so beautiful in his eyes!

"You know," he went on, rapidly, "it is only for *you* I come to Thornhill. Your cousin is like a little girl to me, and I and the squire don't hit it off particularly. When I ride over, it is to see you only, and—and what do you think of Rocklands, Miss—Agnita?"

"Oh, it is lovely—beautiful!" she cried, clasping her hands. "Just everything that is charming; but only just what I expected, with a master of your taste and experience."

"Ah, that is good! I wanted you to like it, for I hope it will one day be your home," he replied.

"My home? What *can* you mean, Mr. Lawson? My home is with my uncle, you know," she replied, simply.

"Yes, it is; but it sha'n't always be, if I can help it," he replied, warmly. "Rocklands wants a mistress to make it perfect, and I want you to be its mistress and my wife, Agnita."

It had come, but she had almost overrated

her strength. Now it had come, the proposal seemed to her intolerable, and she longed to wither him with a look, and rush from the place. As it was, she turned so pale that Peter Lawson was alarmed.

"I have been too abrupt; I have startled you. What a boor I am!" he said. "Sit down"—and he led her to the garden-seat. "Do not be frightened. I love, I admire, I positively adore you, Agnita, and will you be mine?"

"Oh, don't!" she gasped, drawing away her hand, and hiding her face in her handkerchief.

"Nay, why not? I have been too sudden, perhaps, but surely you have seen—" he began.

"I never dreamt—I never for a moment supposed," she faltered, "that you—cared for me Mr. Lawson; and the idea, the surprise, the shock has quite upset me. Give me a moment—give me time to recover myself."

"But I hope there is nothing alarming to you in the idea of being my wife," he said, gravely, taking her hand again and stroking it soothingly.

"Alarming? No! Don't mistake me, Mr. Lawson," she answered. "I feel grateful, honored; but—but I never thought," and she blushed deeply, "that you loved me."

"How could I see you and not love you? You are the handsomest, cleverest woman I ever met—just the wife made for me. Say you will be Mrs. Lawson, Agnita, and let us be married as soon as things can be arranged."

She hesitated, and shivered. "You must give me time to think it over," she said more firmly, after a pause; "this has really taken me by surprise."

"But I may hope?" he said, somewhat dismayed, for he had expected to be accepted at once.

She paused, and glanced toward the end of the path, and there beheld Rupert and Ina, who, all unconscious of their presence, were standing together, while Ina selected a flower from the bouquet she held in her hand and gave it to him.

"Yes; I can, I dare say that much," whispered Agnita, in reply; and Peter Lawson, stooping to kiss her slender hand, did not notice the fierce look of pain that for a moment flitted across her face.

"My beautiful bride," he answered, in the same tone—"for you *will* be mine, I know—thank you a thousand times! But when will you give me your final answer?"

The joyous tones of Ina's voice and Rupert's laugh fell on her ears. She heard their footsteps coming toward them.

"In three days," she replied. "Now let us join my uncle."

And, escaping by a side-path, Peter and Agnita found the squire and Mr. Thynne on

the lawn, the former visibly elated, the latter strangely quiet and subdued.

She had not *quite* pledged herself, she tried to comfort herself with thinking, as she looked at his coarse, shambling figure as he stood beside the squire and Mr. Thynne, and contrasted him with them; and then as Rupert and Ina came up, her heart sunk within her. How could she carry out what she had begun?

"I will play my last card, to-morrow," she thought; "and then if I fail, what does it matter who I marry—Peter Lawson or another? At any rate, Peter is rich, and I shall have everything I want."

Mr. Thornhill looked strangely tired and worn that evening when they reached home, and even Ina's cheerful talk and merry laugh failed to rouse him. He sat silent and thoughtful, and retired for the night early, leaving the girls to themselves.

Agnita was tired, too, and went up-stairs early to her room, after bidding Ina a cold good-night, and leaving her sitting in the drawing-room alone.

Long she sat by the open window in the moonlight, a happy smile on her face and a soft light in her eyes.

"He loves me!—he loves me!" her heart kept saying. "I know it well, and I—I love him in return."

CHAPTER V.

A REVENGEFUL WOMAN.

FAR different were the thoughts that thronged through Agnita's troubled brain. The long weary hours of the night brought her no comfort. She strove to look only on what she considered the bright side of things—Peter Lawson's wealth and position—and to forget that he, who she was nearly resolved should be her future master, was mean, ignoble, and in all things beneath her. Could she do it?

Then the thought of Mr. Thornhill's speech, when he talked to her of her future after his death, came back to her, and his words, "You would always find a home with Ina," rung in her ears. Why was Ina to have a home of her own, and not she?

"She has stolen from me the heart of the only man I ever loved," she muttered, forgetting in her jealous anger that in truth Rupert's heart had never been hers; "and I am to live a humble dependent on her bounty when uncle is dead, and see them happy together!" And as she thought of Rupert's devotion to her cousin she could scarce contain her anger and misery. "It shall not be; he shall not marry her. Mr. Lawson may, perhaps, be my husband; but she shall never be his wife!"

The sun was already above the horizon when Agnita sunk into a restless slumber; and the breakfast bell was ringing when she started up

to find it was ten o'clock, and to hear the voice of Ina on the terrace below talking anxiously to her father.

"Do go and see Doctor Richmond, father, if you will not send for him. You were talking of going into Richfield this morning."

"Doctors don't do anything for me, darling!" replied the squire, sadly.

"But just to please me," she urged. "Come, say yes, and I will drive in with you, dear."

Agnita's heart beat, and she listened eagerly.

Rupert Beauchamp was to ride over that morning she knew. If Ina were only out of the way the opportunity she looked for, and yet dreaded, would be hers; she would be alone when Rupert came, and would be able to speak to him of what was on her mind.

"Well, darling," replied the squire, as if tired refusing, "to please you I will do anything. Order the carriage in an hour, and we will go."

"Thank you, dear papa!" she replied, joyfully; "it will be such a relief to me. Come, let us go in; breakfast is ready."

Even Agnita was struck by the squire's pale face as she entered the breakfast room, and agreed with Ina that a visit to Doctor Richmond was a prudent step.

The squire's looks alarmed her, and she instinctively felt that the doctor's report would be an unfavorable one. She watched her uncle and cousin drive off with an agitated face, and then walked up and down the terrace restlessly, looking ever and anon down the avenue toward the gates, in expectation of seeing Rupert's tall form riding toward the house.

A footstep behind her caused her to start, and turning, she beheld Rupert beside her.

"You quite startled me!" she cried, laying her hand on her heart.

"Did I?" he answered, walking toward the house. "I am so sorry. I walked over instead of riding, and thought it was Ina I saw here from the distance. Where is Miss Thornhill?"

Agnita smiled, almost maliciously, though his quick inquiry for Ina sent a dart to her heart.

"Ina has driven over to Richfield with my uncle, to call on Doctor Richmond," she replied. "Dear me, how disappointed you look! She will be back in half an hour. Cannot you put up with my company for that short time?" she added, in a changed voice. "Time was, Mr. Beauchamp, when we have passed more than half an hour in each other's company alone. Perhaps you found it dull, though, but I did not."

Rupert looked embarrassed, and hardly knew how to reply.

Agnita continued, after a pause:

"If half an hour seems so long a time, what must four years seem, or even three? Yet

there are days that have passed. Things that happened three years ago seem to me like yesterday, and the remembrance of which haunts me day and night!"

She was silent again for a moment, and then resumed, with a heightened color, and eyes that sparkled and flashed through the tears that filled them.

"I do not know what it is that urges me to speak, but speak this day, I must!" she cried. "Rupert! Rupert! why did you deceive me? Why did you, three years ago, leave me, after having won my heart? Was it honorable, was it manly, to win my love and then throw me aside?"

"Miss Elverson," cried Rupert, in great agitation, "what are you saying?—what are you accusing me of? As Heaven is my witness, I never tried to win your love! I never deceived you either in word or—"

"You never openly spoke of love. No, I know it, but you made me love you! Were we not always together? Were we not looked upon by every one as affianced lovers? Was not everybody deceived as I was? And yet, Rupert, you did once love me! Ah, for pity's sake, tell me how I lost your love? Tell me how I may regain it?"

Most beautiful she looked as she leant toward him, her eyes full of eloquent tears, her lips quivering, and her bosom heaving.

Was it all acting, or was she really suffering, and had she suffered for him all along? The thought troubled Rupert greatly.

"Agnita," he said, gently, "if I once misled you as to my feelings, forgive me! You are doubtless worthy of the love of a better man than I. I acknowledge that when we first met, I thought—I dreamt for a while—"

"Go on," she said, in low, eager accents—"go on!"

"I thought for a while that we might have been happy together, but before long I found that I was mistaken—that I could never have made you happy!"

"You were wrong—you were wrong!" she said, hurriedly. "Hear me, Rupert! I love you! You are the only man in all my life I have loved! Though many have been at my feet, I have not cared for one! But you I love, and oh, believe me, have always loved! Those days we spent together, three years ago, when I believed you were learning to love me, I have never forgotten—can never forget! Can they not come again, Rupert? Will you not let me prove to you that you were wrong when you thought we could not make each other happy?"

Her voice trembled as she spoke, and her eyes burned with a soft, sad light, that rendered them irresistibly winning.

For one short moment Rupert wondered whether he had made a great mistake, but for

one instant only; the next, and he was as sure as ever that Agnita was the last woman in the world to make him happy. But it was difficult to answer such an appeal.

"It would be better to forget those days, Miss Elverson," he said, at last. "If in any way I misled you, I cannot sufficiently blame myself, but—"

"Rupert, have you no pity?" she sobbed. "Can you not see that I love you? Oh, help me!—save me from a terrible fate!"

"A terrible fate? What can you mean?" he cried.

"I mean a loveless marriage! It is only you—you alone who can do so! Rupert, say you will let me try to win your love—that you will no longer be cold and distant to me—that—"

"It is too late! Even that could not be now, Agnita," he said, gravely; "it is not in my power to love you now I—"

"Ah!" she cried, starting up as if a snake had stung her. "Speak—tell me—tell me what I knew before, perhaps; tell me you love another!"

And her features worked convulsively.

"It is even so!" he replied; "and if you knew it, Miss Elverson—"

"Silence! I wanted to hear it from your own lips!" she replied. "You love Ina Thornhill! Is it not so?"

"It is," he answered.

She burst into a harsh laugh, half-pitying, half-contemptuous; and the cold, cruel light in her eyes almost frightened him, as he gazed at her in wonder and horror.

"For a child like that you throw aside my love—you scorn *me* for *her*!" she cried. "But take care—take care!"

"Take care for what?" he returned, coldly. "You are too excited, Miss Elverson; let us end this conversation."

"Ah, you think to get rid of me; but beware! I have loved you, Rupert Beauchamp, but I may learn to hate you! Ah! you smile contemptuously, as if my hate were a poor thing; but you may yet feel it as well as Ina, the girl who has come between us."

Rupert was veritably startled at the manner in which the last words were uttered.

"When Ina is my wife—" he returned, coldly.

"Your wife! Mark me, she will *never* be your wife!" retorted Agnita.

"I differ with you. I may be presumptuous," he answered, "but I think I am not indifferent to her. She is reserved, it is true; but she is too guileless and innocent altogether to hide her feelings; and I—"

"You believe she loves you! I tell you, Rupert Beauchamp—and think of me when the day comes—that sooner or later Ina Thornhill, whom you believe to be so loving, and

guileless, and innocent, will refuse to be your wife; though, maybe, you will plead with her as I have this night pleaded with you, for her love."

For a moment Rupert was silent; then he would have spoken again, but she had seized his hand and was pressing it wildly to her burning lips.

"Go—leave me now," she cried, flinging it from her; "I can bear no more. The day will come when you will repent of all you have done, and be sorry that you turned a loving woman into a hopeless fiend. Go!"

And she waved her hand toward the door.

He hesitated for a moment to leave her, she looked so wild and white; but, with an imperious gesture, she signed to him again to depart, and, with a sigh, he left her.

"That is over, then!" she panted, putting back her disordered hair from her face—"that is over and we are enemies! Peter Lawson, you have conquered. I am ready to give you your answer when you will—this moment, if so it pleases you, and promise to be your dutiful, loving wife whenever it shall please you to take me for better or for worse. But I have work before me to do, and I must arrange my plans and think it out."

So saying, Agnita seated herself by the window, a dark, evil look on her handsome face, and fell into deep thought.

Time passed on. Mr. Thornhill and his daughter did not return, and Rupert was reluctantly compelled to go home without seeing Ina.

So disturbed was he by this interview with Agnita that he had resolved to ask her that day to be his wife, and to get Mr. Thornhill's consent to their speedy union. He distrusted Agnita, and dreaded that she would try to sow discord between him and Ina, or, perhaps, the squire; and resolved to make Ina his own before she had time to carry her plans into execution.

The hours passed on, and Agnita, forgetful of time, sat pondering over her schemes in the big arm-chair till the clock struck two, and the butler entered, requesting to be told whether he should send up lunch or wait for his master's return.

Agnita bade him wait, and three o'clock struck ere the carriage was seen approaching the house.

In a moment Agnita saw something had gone wrong. Doctor Richmond was in the carriage, seated by the squire, who was propped up with pillows and looked ghastly white; while Ina's tearful face betrayed that something sad and unexpected had happened.

"He was taken ill just before he reached Doctor Richmond's house," she explained. "Oh, Agnita, I feel sure he thinks very badly of him!"

"Your father must be kept quiet, my dear Miss Thornhill," said the doctor, after the squire had been taken up-stairs to his room. "Above all things, avoid saying or doing anything that might agitate him. Don't let him see many people. Watch him carefully, and give him the medicine I have left regularly. I will call again this evening."

All that day, and the next, and for many days after, Ina watched by her father's sick-bed, scarcely leaving him for a moment, her place being supplied by Agnita when she could be prevailed upon to take a little needful sleep. She saw no one, not even Rupert, who called daily, and who always found Agnita in the drawing-room ready to answer his inquiries.

"Ina would come, I am sure," she said, seeming to have forgotten the stormy conversation that had passed between them, "but uncle cannot bear her to leave him even for a moment. Can I take any message to her?"

"Only my best wishes and condolences; and tell her she is never out of my thoughts," replied Rupert.

And Agnita promised with a sweet smile, to deliver the message; but no mention was made of it to Ina, and it was not until she questioned Agnita that she knew of Rupert's visits.

"He has called once or twice to inquire, like the rest of the people," Agnita said, unconcernedly. "Seeing how intimate he has been here, he might show a little more interest in your father's health than he does, I must say."

Ina sighed.

"When papa is better, I dare say he will come and sit with him," she said.

"Yes, I dare say—when he is better," she answered.

But Agnita felt pretty certain that that day would never come.

CHAPTER VI.

A TERRIBLE REVELATION.

AGNITA was not mistaken. The days of her uncle's pilgrimage were indeed rapidly drawing to a close, and from the time he took to his room it was plain that all hopes of any real improvement in his condition were vain.

Slowly and gradually he sunk away without much pain of body, but it was evident he had a weight on his mind, some secret he longed to confide to some one, but could not bring himself to speak about.

"Poor little Ina!" he would often mutter, as he watched his child flitting gently and quietly about his sick-room. "I feel as if I should be easier if I could tell her—nay, I ought not to die without telling her. It might come on her some day with a terrible shock if I did. Some blundering idiot or some cruel friend might blurt out the tale suddenly. Does Agnita know the truth, I wonder? But to her I could

never bring myself to speak of it. Well, well! before I die I must make the effort, and tell her. Not now, though—not now."

And so he put it off to a more convenient season.

As time passed on, and he grew weaker, the impossibility of speaking to his daughter, his utter inability to undertake the mental exertion of telling her what he wished or dreaded to impart, became evident and painful.

He would begin—then hesitate—then abruptly stop, and bid Ina remind him of what he had to tell her another day, till the girl's mind was filled with anxiety to learn what it was that her father desired so deeply and yet hesitated to confide to her, and though she did not dare in his weak condition to urge him to speak, she yet longed to know what the mystery was.

He had mentioned her mother's name to her one day, almost for the first time in her life—mentioned it with such evident anguish of mind that Ina had felt a thrill of terror pass through her frame, and a conviction that the secret, whatever it might be, was connected with her. But the effort was too much for him; tears had stopped his speech, and with a heartrending sigh he had relapsed into silence.

"Thynne knows; but I could not ask him to tell her. He believes she knows. Agnita—but she is so cold and unsympathizing. Yet it may fall on her to have to do it. I will ask her does she know."

A few hours after, when Ina had for a moment or two left her father's bedside, Agnita took her place beside it.

She had been summoned to her uncle suddenly, and had left Ina and Rupert Beauchamp in the hall, her bosom swelling with jealousy and anger as she watched the look of joy that passed over his face, and the faint blush that rose to Ina's pale cheek, as they met. How, in a moment, her presence was forgotten, and Rupert was alive only to that of Ina! She feared, too, that Ina might learn how much oftener Rupert had been to Thornhill than she had made out; and though she felt pretty sure that no declaration of love would be made by him directly while the squire's state was so precarious, she grudged leaving the two alone.

She entered her uncle's room, therefore, in no very gentle frame of mind, and took her seat beside the bed in silence.

"Agnita, is it you?" said the invalid.

"Yes," she replied. "Ina has left you for the present."

He sighed.

"Agnita," he said, "I have a question to ask you."

The tone of his voice startled her, it was so full of anxiety.

"What is it, uncle?" she said, quickly.

"Do you—did you ever hear—do you know the full particulars of my darling wife's death?" he whispered, in an agonized voice.

Agnita paled, and her face set oddly.

"Yes—all," she answered, in a low, stern voice.

"Then I have a last request to make of you. I cannot tell Ina. I have tried hard, but I cannot. Will you tell her, Agnita, when I am gone, and—and—"

Agnita trembled violently, and large drops of perspiration stood on her forehead.

"Yes; I will tell her—if you really desire it," she replied, in an agitated tone. "But is it necessary?"

"Yes—yes; she ought to know. I should not have kept it from her so long," he replied.

"As you will, uncle; I will tell her," replied Agnita, her bosom heaving, and her color coming and going strangely.

"And you knew it all along?" he said.

"Since I was a child almost," she answered.

"When I am gone, she should be told—not before; unless I can pluck up courage to tell her myself. It won't be long to wait. When I am dead, Agnita, you will find yourself remembered in my will; and Ina, I know, will always give you a home."

"Thank you, uncle; but I shall not need one!" she answered, haughtily.

"Why?—how do you mean?" he said, with a certain amount of interest in his languid voice.

"I did not mean to have spoken of it just now," replied Agnita; "but I am engaged to Mr. Peter Lawson, and he wished that our marriage should take place as soon as possible."

"To Peter Lawson?" replied the squire, surprised and some concern in his voice. "Are you sure you are taking a wise step, Agnita?"

"I think so, uncle. It is time I must be settled in life; I am, as you so often tell me, no longer young. He is an honest man, and rich."

"Ay; but believe me, riches are not everything in married life, Agnita. Is there that affection, that similarity of mind and tastes, that would make him a companion fit for you? At your age, my dear, one cannot expect you to be violently in love as a young girl might, neither would one expect a romantic attachment on Mr. Lawson's part; but do you esteem each other, and—"

"I think I shall be happy as his wife," she replied, coldly; "and I shall be thankful to have a home of my own at last. I am grateful to you, uncle, for your kindness to me, and the shelter you have given me for the last five years, but—"

"Have you not been happy?" asked the squire, in surprise.

"Happy!" replied Agnita, in a strange tone. "You did your best to make me so, I know,

sir; but—but nothing can be the same as one's own home."

"You are right there, I suppose, Agnita," he replied. "Well, I am glad you have so bright a prospect before you, and trust you will be happy. Ina—"

"Do not tell Ina; do not mention it to any one," she said, anxiously. "I have told no one yet."

"No; I will say nothing. Ah! here is Ina at last. Do not forget your promise, Agnita, if my own courage fails," he said.

"No, I will not forget," said Agnita, the evil expression coming into her face that now so often disfigured it, as she noticed the gleam of happiness that illuminated Ina's sweet countenance. "I will go now, uncle, for I have some letters to write."

A cold, cruel light was in her eyes as she took her seat before the writing-table, and it darkened as her eyes fell on an unopened letter from Peter Lawson.

"I will tell her, sure enough, *my tale*," she muttered, "and I will not be beholden to her for a home. Miss Thornhill will have to find a new companion and housekeeper when I am Mrs. Lawson and my revenge is complete. Ah, Rupert Beauchamp, I told you to beware of my hate! You shall rue the day you braved it!"

She opened her suitor's letter, read it and threw it carelessly aside.

"If my uncle could read that, he would give Mr. Peter Lawson credit for being able to feel a romantic attachment even at the age of fifty. Heigho! I hope he won't bore me with his affection; but he'll sober down, doubtless, after a time, and we shall jog on together comfortably enough. I wonder what my uncle has left me; but it's not of much moment now. When I am married I shall not want for money. I wonder—I wonder what Ina will do when—"

And leaning her face on her hands, she fell into a deep reverie.

The last scene in the drama of the squire's life was soon to be enacted, and ere the autumn had robbed the trees of their leaves the end came at the last.

When too late, he had struggled to tell his secret to Ina. Death stopped his breath, and he went with the unuttered words on his lips, casting a look on Agnita which she well understood and which sent a shiver through her as he sunk into the sleep that knows no waking.

Ina's grief was deep and passionate. Her father had been her one care—everything to her—and his loss left a void in her heart never to be filled. It was days before she left her room or was able to meet her most intimate friends. It seemed as if she would never be able to go about the world again like her former self.

She was left her father's heiress. Everything—Thornhill and all within and around it—belonged to her. To Agnita was left a legacy of ten thousand dollars.

"You will always stay with me, Agnita. You know you will always be welcome here," said Ina, kindly, as they were talking over the future, three or four weeks after the squire's death.

Agnita looked at her coldly.

"I will stay with you for awhile, Ina, certainly," she replied; "but I have not, I cannot yet decide what my future course will be, or how long—"

"What! you do not mean to leave Thornhill surely? Where would you go, Agnita?" said Ina, in surprise.

Agnita smiled.

"I may leave you. Who knows, Ina? Poor little thing, you would find this big house dull all alone!" she replied.

Ina looked up quickly in her face.

"What!" she said, "has he—has Mr. Peter Lawson—"

"We won't speak of that just now, Ina," she replied. "I cannot think of such things so soon after our loss."

"You are right. You have a feeling heart, dear Agnita," she replied, with a guilty feeling at her heart when she remembered how for days she had longed to see Rupert, and what a comfort the short visit he had paid her on the previous day had been; how she had felt at once that there was still some one left to care for her—some one she could love and trust; and Rupert had left the house as sure of her love as if she had promised to be his.

"Agnita," said Ina, in a dreamy voice, a few minutes afterward, "there is one thing that troubles me. Oh, if my dear father had but been able to tell me what he seemed to have in his mind to tell me before he died! I shall never know it now!"—and she sighed.

Agnita drew a long breath, and her hands, which were clasped together on her lap, were locked and unlocked nervously.

"Do you know," went on Ina, "I have often fancied it was about mamma he wished to speak. I can hardly remember her, and he never told me anything about her. Could it have been that, do you think?"

For an instant Agnita was silent; then she spoke in a husky voice, "I believe—I know it was, Ina."

"What! did he tell you so?" she inquired, anxiously.

"He did," she answered; "and what is more, Ina, he bade me tell you the secret that troubled him, if he had not courage to tell it himself. Oh, I wish he had spared me the task! I wish he had never asked me!" And a look of repugnance came into Agnita's face.

"What! is it such a terrible secret then?" cried Ina, in terror. "Speak—tell me what it is?"

"Do not ask me—do not! You could not bear it!" cried Agnita, shrinking from her.

"If my father wished me to hear it, it is my duty to do so," she replied; "and if he bade you tell me the secret, it is your duty to tell me. I am stronger than you think, dear! I can bear it. Speak!"

There was a strange glitter in Agnita's dark eyes as Ina spoke.

"Is it really your wish, Ina? The secret is a terrible one. It may—it may blight your life; and, remember, it must be repeated to *no one*. That was your dead father's desire. You must bear the burden of it alone. You and I will be the only ones in the world who know it. It must die with us."

Ina had grown whiter and whiter as her cousin spoke, and trembled violently.

"Speak!" she said again in a whisper. "I must know it some day."

"It is about your mother," said Agnita, greatly agitated; "about her death. Did you not know there was a mystery about it?"

Ina shook her head, her breath coming fast and thick.

"People thought the death was sudden, and there was some talk about it at the time, but no one knew the rights of the case but your father and the old doctor (who is since dead), mamma, to whom your father told it, and I. Your poor mother took her own life, Ina—she was mad."

"Mad!" muttered Ina. "Mad!"

And there was such concentrated anguish and horror in her tone, that even Agnita paused and looked at her in alarm.

"Yes; it came on suddenly. For some time your father could not be persuaded that it was so; but when she poisoned herself, he knew it was so."

"Poor papa!—poor papa! No wonder he never spoke of it," murmured Ina; "no wonder he could never bear to mention it! And he loved her so! My poor, poor mother!"

"Your father was never the same man afterward," went on Agnita, hurriedly. "Of course the affair was hushed up, and if remarks were made, the truth never came out. It seems that a generation or two back the same complaint had been known in your mother's family, but she was an orphan with few relatives, and it was not till after her death your father found it out. It was a terrible blow to him, and gave him many a miserable, anxious hour when he thought of you, Ina, and your future, for—"

Agnita ceased suddenly, and sprung forward to catch Ina's tottering form. The shock had been too much for her. The hideous future that

Agnita's last words conjured up before her, overcame her, and she sunk, fainting, into her cousin's arms.

CHAPTER VII.

MARRIED FOR MONEY.

THE awakening to life again was an awakening to mental agony for Ina. At first she could hardly realize the full effect that the revelation Agnita had made to her would have on her future life; but slowly the whole terrible truth came to her. Her mother had died a maniac! The fell disease was in her blood! At any moment she herself might fall a victim to it.

She shuddered with horror as she thought of it. To lose sight, hearing, speech—one or all would be preferable to this. What so terrible in this world as the loss of reason?

From henceforth she would dread to look forward. The years could but bring her nearer and nearer to the day that must come, and which she dreaded so sorely.

What had life in store for her now? No happiness, no joy. The specter of this terrible probability stood ever before her, and robbed her of all peace and tranquillity.

And Rupert—Rupert, who loved her, and whom she loved so dearly—how dearly she had never felt till now—she must give him up. She could never be his wife—she could never marry! No; her life must drag on in single wretchedness till the day should come when she must disappear from the world and be heard of no more by it—till it should learn that death had released her from her trouble!

"He will suffer like me," she sobbed to herself. "He loves me, and believes I love him, though we have never said so to each other. And I cannot tell him this—I dare not speak of it. My father's last command, it seems, was that I should not divulge the secret to any one. Oh, what can I do? How can I ever make him believe and understand that though I love him, I can never, never be his?"

A long illness followed, and at the end of it Ina was ordered to pass some time at a quiet watering-place, where she could rest and recover her strength and spirits.

"She is suffering from great nervous depression," said the doctor, "caused, doubtless, by her recent loss. She must be kept quiet and free from agitation. You will see to that, Miss Elverson, I particularly request."

And poor Ina, overhearing his words, put a far different construction on them than the good doctor intended.

"Ah, he fears my mind may become unsettled. He sees the predisposition to mental disorder in me; but how can I be quiet? How

can I be free from agitation! It is impossible!"

Agnita hastened to arrange for the removal of her cousin, and carried out as far as she could the doctor's order as to keeping her quiet. She was determined that Rupert Beauchamp should not see her before her departure, and was deaf to all his entreaties for an interview with her.

"You surely do not wish to injure her—perhaps irreparably?" she said, in reply to his pleadings, and with a harsh voice and sarcastic manner. "Agitation of any kind is what we have to avoid. Ina is of a painfully excitable disposition, and—"

"What, Ina!—the quietest, the most calm!" began Rupert, in astonishment.

"Ah, you are a thorough man; you judge from the outside of things!" replied Agnita, bitterly. "You have not seen Ina since her father's death, except for a few minutes at a time, and I dare say you thought her wonderfully calm, as I did, till she broke down. She is much altered, Mr. Beauchamp; do not insist on seeing her."

And when from behind the sheltering branches of some friendly evergreens Rupert saw Ina drive away from Thornhill, he was forced to allow that so far Agnita was right—that Ina was painfully altered. Her calm blue eyes blazed with a feverish light; there was a pained, anxious, frightened look on her sweet face he had never seen there before; a restless, nervous expression in the whole face and figure that it troubled him inexpressibly to observe.

Two months at the watering-place passed away rather slowly. Ina's spirits did not improve, and she was not a very lively companion to Agnita, who almost welcomed the arrival of Mr. Lawson when he came down to pay her a visit.

"You won't object to seeing him, Ina, will you?" said Agnita, as she folded up Mr. Lawson's letter announcing his approaching visit. "I gave you a hint of it once, but late events have prevented my telling you all about it. I am engaged, Ina."

"To Mr. Lawson? I thought—" began Ina.

"You thought I did not care for him. Isn't that it, Ina? Well, I am not one of those people who let all the world see when they are in love; but he and I have been engaged several months—ever since our visit to Rocklands, in fact."

"Really!" cried Ina, looking more interested in her cousin's news than she had ever appeared to be in anything since her father's death. "Dear Agnita, I am so glad!"

And she held up her face to her for a kiss.

Agnita stooped and just touched her forehead with her lips, while a look of repulsion spread over her face.

"I shall miss you dreadfully, Agnita," continued Ina, with a sigh. "I shall feel home dreadfully lonely now. I must look out for a companion, I suppose. When is your marriage to take place, dear?"

"Mr. Lawson wishes it to be as soon as possible. Indeed, if things had happened differently, we should have been married by this time. So I hope you will make an effort and get well soon, Ina; for, of course, I can't leave you while you are in this state. If you would occupy yourself, and try and take an interest in things, you would soon get better. Brooding is the very worst thing for you."

"I will try, Agnita," she answered, meekly—"for your sake I will try and get well quickly. And, oh! I do hope you will be happy, dear!"

"I do not doubt it," replied Agnita, coldly. "The mere fact of having a home of my own will make me happy; and Mr. Lawson is an easy going sort of man, with whom, I dare say, I shall get on; so I am quite contented."

Ina sunk back, with a sigh.

How different were Agnita's ideas of married happiness to hers! In what a different way had she looked forward to a marriage with Rupert! But she answered, kindly:

"I am sure one so good and beautiful as you are, and so clever too, should be happy. Mr. Lawson is a lucky man, dear."

"Yes," she replied, with a laugh that puzzled Ina by its harshness. "We are a well-matched couple, are we not, Ina?"

During the two months that passed while Agnita and Ina were at the seaside, several changes had occurred at Richfield.

Mr. Thynne had left the Rectory on a long visit to a brother out West, and a new rector had come in his place; while illness had obliged the old housekeeper at Thornhill to leave her situation, and before she had been absent many days, news of her death reached her young mistress.

"Another vacant place to fill up!" sighed Ina. "My home will be quite changed without you and Mrs. Mills, Agnita."

"I hope you don't class Agnita's loss with that of a servant, Miss Thornhill," said Peter Lawson, who happened to be present, and who thought it his duty to fire up at his intended being mentioned in the same breath as a housekeeper.

"You must excuse Ina, Peter," replied Agnita, with a sarcastic laugh. "You know I was not at home at Thornhill. I was really only a companion, and—"

"Agnita, how can you say such things, even in joke?" cried Ina, much hurt.

"There! there, my dear! don't agitate yourself," she replied, "or you won't be able to be at my wedding on the twenty-sixth. By the

way, Mr. Lawson and I have arranged to be married in town, Ina, not at Richfield."

"Not at Richfield?" cried Ina.

"No; we think it better not. Mrs. Dangerfield will give the breakfast—Mr. Lawson's aunt, you know—and so you need not be worried."

"But I looked forward to its being at Thornhill; and it is to be on the twenty-sixth, Agnita—so soon!" she replied, in an aggrieved tone.

"So soon! You should not say that," cried Mr. Lawson. "Surely eight months is long enough for an engagement to last."

"And you will come to me afterward, Agnita?" said Ina.

"Yes, yes—for a few days, when we have returned from abroad, Ina, if you will have us. By the way, you will be ready to leave this in a week or two, won't you?"

"Oh, whenever you like," replied Ina.

And another fortnight saw them in New York, where Agnita's trousseau was being prepared.

But a sudden fit of the gout, which attacked Mr. Peter Lawson about this time, caused the marriage to be delayed, and Agnita and Ina returned to pass a week or two at Thornhill before the wedding should come off.

Rupert Beauchamp was not at the Lodge when they arrived; he had gone on a business trip in a very unhappy, unsettled state of mind, believing that Ina would not return home for some weeks yet. He had written to Ina several times, and received no answer to his letters, and this neglect on her part had wounded him not a little. He had written to Agnita, begging for news, and her reply had been cold and unsatisfactory.

Agnita was glad he should be away. She wished the news of her marriage to come to him suddenly, and she thought that, in all probability, as no one seemed to know exactly his whereabouts, he would hear of it first through the newspapers; and she knew he would feel it a slight that he had not been informed of it beforehand. As to his letters to Ina, she had taken care they had never reached her; but, strange to say, Ina had made no remark on his silence. She felt it deeply, but strove to believe it was for the best; that as she could never marry him, it would be perhaps a blessing if it should turn out that he had forgotten her.

At length Mr. Lawson was well again, and the day for the wedding fixed. Ina and Agnita set out for New York, and took up their abode at Mr. Dangerfield's till Agnita should be made the wife of Mr. Lawson.

It was a grand wedding, and a magnificent breakfast followed it. The bride looked supremely lovely, and was dressed to perfec-

tion; while the diamonds the groom had given her flashed and glittered in the masses of her dark hair and on her white arras, while a magnificent necklace of the same stones adorned her slender throat.

Surely such a regal-looking bride had never stepped out of her carriage and walked up the isle of St. Mark's church before!

"Rather a contrast to her husband," whispered one of the wedding guests. "Has got a will of her own, and a temper of her own, I wager."

"She'll have need of both if she thinks to hold her own with Mr. Lawson," replied the other. "He may seem soft and easy-going enough now; but he can be about as obstinate and selfish, and as unpleasant and hard as any man I know when he is put out. I don't envy his wife."

But, confident of her own powers, and certain that she could twist him round her little finger, Agnita felt no fear, and stepped into the carriage with her husband lightly and gayly, and was driven off on her wedding-tour, leaving Ina to return to Thornhill alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

HER SACRIFICE.

HER home seemed dreary and solitary to Ina when she returned to it. At every turn something or another reminded her of her lost father, and brought her hopeless future vividly before her. There stood his arm-chair in its accustomed place; there, on the table, lay the books he loved to read; while on the piano were the songs she had last sung with Rupert Beauchamp; and she remembered the very tone of his voice, every look in his dark, passionate eyes, as she turned over the leaves she had last looked upon with him at her side and her father near.

She had brought a mild, quiet, gentle-looking, middle aged lady from town to act as companion to her; and, with the exception of Mrs. Garnet, she saw no one. Her days were passed almost in solitude, and nothing seemed to rouse or interest her. Even her poor people were rarely visited now; for the new rector did not approve of the lavish manner in which the charities of Thornhill had been administered; told Ina that all the assistance given to the people should be distributed by him, and that she was only paupering the parish by giving right and left with open hands.

So Ina partly gave up a pursuit that she had hitherto looked on as a privilege as well as a duty, only hoping that Mr. Thynne would soon return, and that she would be allowed to make her usual donations to the poor before the winter set in.

It was nearly a fortnight after Agnita's wedding that news of the marriage reached Rupert,

and he felt hurt that his first notice of it should come to him through a newspaper.

Ina might have written to him about it, he thought; but Ina had grown strangely silent and forgetful. Surely if her grief had so much subsided, and her health so much improved as to enable her to be present at a fashionable wedding such as the paper described, she was able, if she pleased, to write an account of it to him? Was she changing toward him? Had her grief quenched her love for him, or had another stepped in between them?

It was a week later that Rupert arrived unexpectedly at the Lodge, without sending notice to his servants of his coming, and next morning he rode over to see Ina.

How changed she was!—he scarcely could believe it was she; and her manner was so altered toward him that his heart turned cold with dismay.

She looked at him with an air almost of terror, and the color faded from her cheek as she stretched out a thin white hand to him, and begged him, in a faltering voice, to be seated, looking nervously toward the door meanwhile, as if expecting the entrance of some one. He was startled, alarmed, and could not conceal his concern.

"Are you ill, Miss Thornhill—Ina?" he said. "Heavens!—what has happened to you?"

Her lip quivered, but she answered him in a low, firm voice.

"I am much better, Mr. Beauchamp. The change of air did a great deal for me."

Still he looked at her, with grief and wonder in his face.

"You look still sadly in need of advice," he said. "I hope—"

"Oh, I consulted the best doctors in town," replied Ina, carelessly. "Do not be anxious about me; I am not ill. You saw the account of Agnita's marriage in the papers, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"Yes," he replied, shortly, remembering his disappointment at not having been informed of it by Ina.

"I heard from her yesterday—they are at Rome, but do not remain there long; and Mr. Lawson seems anxious to return to America in a few weeks' time. It will be nice having them so near."

"Undoubtedly you must miss your cousin; but tell me, Ina"—and his voice trembled and softened—"have you ever spared a thought for me all these months? You don't know how I have missed you and longed for you."

Ina trembled. He could see her pale lips quiver, but her voice was steady enough as she replied, coldly, "It was kind of you to think of me in my trouble, Mr. Beauchamp, as you may imagine it has been a sore one to me."

"Undoubtedly. Yet—forgive me for say-

ing it—could you not have spared a few moments to write to me sometimes? I wearied for news of you. Surely you must have felt how anxious I was to learn all particulars of you?”

“I was too ill to write—Agnita wrote,” she replied, hastily, glancing again nervously toward the door.

And Rupert could discern a look of relief on her face when it opened and Mrs. Garnet entered.

All private conversation between them was hopeless from that moment, as Rupert soon found out. The placid little woman sat working silently within earshot of them, seldom entering into the conversation, yet effectually preventing it taking any but a commonplace everyday turn. All confidences were out of the question, and at length Rupert rose, baffled.

“I may come and see you again soon?” he said to Ina, holding her hand in his a moment longer than necessary.

But the hand was slowly withdrawn—there was no answering pressure from it, as there had been in former days, and there was a curious ring of distress in Ina’s voice as she replied, “I am always glad to see old friends, but at present I have admitted very few to visit me; it is almost too much for me.”

“Nay, my dear; you should try and rouse yourself a little,” said Mrs. Garnet, suddenly, and Rupert blessed her in his heart for the words. “You must not shut yourself up too much, you know.”

“I quite agree with you,” he said, warmly, “Miss Thornhill wants cheerful society. Let me come again soon, and bring you some of my Swiss sketches to look over, Ina. You used to be fond of looking at drawings, I remember.”

His voice was so imploring, that Ina’s resolution was overcome.

“I shall be glad to see you, though I fear I am bad company for any one just now. Next week, then,” she said.

“Next week!” he repeated, almost reproachfully. “Well, as you like. I must not ask too much now, I suppose. Good-by, till then, Ina!”

And with a sad heart, Rupert quitted her.

“What has come over her?” he thought. “My poor Ina—how changed she is! I could not have imagined it possible. Oh, if I had but the right to comfort and protect her, I would soon bring back the smiles to her face and joy to her heart; and some day, please Heaven, I shall have the right! I must wait, and be patient, till time has enabled her to get over her great sorrow.”

But days and weeks passed on, and yet Ina did not regain her cheerfulness, and treated Rupert with persistent coldness and distance. It seemed as if she had totally forgotten all that

had passed between them before her father’s death, totally ignored their former position. He was treated by her with kindness, certainly; but simply as an old friend, and nothing nearer.

It puzzled him sorely and wounded him deeply, and at length he determined to speak out as soon as an opportunity offered.

A course of months had passed, and Mr. and Mrs. Lawson had returned home; and one morning, as Rupert rode slowly over to Thornhill, he saw Agnita’s pony-carriage standing at the door, and knew that she was within.

For a moment he hesitated, then dismounted, and asked for Miss Thornhill.

As the door of the drawing room opened, he heard a sob, and Ina’s voice said, “I try to hide my feelings from him!”

And then she stopped, and the servant announced him to the ladies.

He thought he saw a malicious gleam of triumph on Agnita’s countenance as Ina, stilling her sobs, instantly rose to greet him with an almost icy manner.

She shook hands with him, however, with effusion.

“So delighted to see you again, Mr. Beauchamp! I did so wish you had been in New York, to be present at my wedding! You never answered my note of invitation, which I directed, on the chance of its finding you, to the Lodge; so I suppose you did not get it. Mr. Lawson and I have had a delightful tour in Italy, and are now settling down at Rocklands. Our little Ina does not look so blooming as she ought, does she?”

And Mrs. Lawson looked at Ina with a patronizing air.

“Miss Thornhill does not look well,” replied Rupert, coldly. “I have done my best to cheer her, Mrs. Lawson, but I fear I have failed. No doubt you will succeed better.”

The tears started to Ina’s eyes at the hurt tones of his voice, and she hurriedly left the room to hide them.

“What is the matter with her, Mrs. Lawson?” cried Rupert, imploringly, turning to Agnita. “She is quite different from the Ina of old days—so cold, so distant, so reserved! Have I offended her, or why is it that she treats me so strangely?”

Mrs. Lawson laughed disagreeably, and looked at Rupert with an air of insolent amusement.

“What! she has altered her mind, has she—the naughty little puss? What a shame! I am sorry for you, Mr. Beauchamp, but you should have made hay while the sun shone. I suppose she has got over her childish fancy for you. She is but a child even now, you know; and men and children love change. Ha, ha! You must not be too hard on her!”

So saying, she rose, and wrapping her cloak around her, prepared to go.

"Mr. Lawson cannot bear me to be away at luncheon-time," she said, "so I must be off. Good-by, Mr. Beauchamp, and don't bother your head about Ina. She's only changed her mind like other people. Adieu!"

And Agnita, still smiling insolently, sailed out of the room.

"I have punished him as he deserved," she said, her face changing and taking its dark, evil look, as she sunk back in the carriage. "Ina will never marry—I can see that. I judged rightly the effect my news would have on her. Perhaps—but we must wait and see how things go. Now to persuade Mr. Peter that Fifth avenue is the only place in New York in which it is consistent with his dignity to live, and that five thousand a year is not too large a rent to pay for a good house. I find my lord a little harder to manage than I anticipated. He waxes obstinate sometimes."

Rupert looked after her with a sudden feeling of dislike and suspicion. He felt certain she had something to do with Ina's altered manner to him, and resolved at once to know the truth.

Ina re-entered the room a moment or two later, and cast an inquiring glance round it.

"What! has Agnita gone?" she said. "Why did she leave so suddenly? and where is Mrs. Garnet? I—I wanted to introduce her to Agnita! How unfortunate!" she said.

"I am glad Mrs. Lawson is gone," said Rupert, decidedly. "Stay—don't ring for Mrs. Garnet; I want to talk to you, Ina—I want to speak to you alone."

He laid his hand on her arm as he spoke, and, glancing helplessly toward the door, she sunk into a chair.

"What is it?" she faltered, looking so scared that Rupert felt cut to the heart.

"You were not at one time afraid to be left alone in my company," he said, sorrowfully.

"Oh, Ina, Ina! what has come between us? Whence has arisen this coldness and reserve? What have I done to offend you?"

"Nothing—you have done nothing," she replied, hurriedly; "but believe me it is better so."

"Better! How can it be, Ina? It is breaking my heart! I love you—no words can tell how I love you! And had it not been for the sad trouble that fell on you, I should long ago have asked you to be my wife, for in the dear old days when the squire was with us you did love me, Ina! You never told me so, but I saw it! Oh, why did I delay—why did I not speak then? But it all came to an end so suddenly! Tell me why you are so distant to me, Ina? Do you love me no longer?"

He looked passionately and eagerly into her

pale face, and noticed how her lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears.

"Do not ask me—do not urge me to speak!" she murmured. "Forget all that has passed, and let us live at peace, as friends!"

"And why only as friends?" he replied. "Be my wife, Ina! You know that is what I want! I cannot live without you!"

His wife! Her heart yearned toward him, yet she shuddered at the word.

"I shall never marry!" she replied, shortly, hiding her face in her hands.

"Never marry? But why? What new idea—what strange fancy is this, Ina?" he cried. "Oh, confide in me, my darling! Be your old self! Give me your love and confidence, and the dark cloud that seems now oppressing you will pass away! Tell me what ails you, Ina?"

It was a terrible temptation. If she could only tell him why she could never be his, her heart would be lighter.

She opened her lips to speak, and then she remembered what Agnita had said, that it was her father's last desire that the secret should never be revealed, and she closed them again, sitting pale and agitated, without replying to Rupert's appeal.

"I see how it is," he went on, almost angrily. "Some one has been making mischief between us, and trying to separate us. Has Agnita been setting you against me, Ina? I have distrusted her for—"

"Agnita? No; believe me, she has never said a word to me against you," said Ina, in surprise. "You are wrong to suspect her. No one has set me against you, Rupert, and indeed, indeed I am not changed; but"—and she burst into heart-broken sobs—"I cannot be your wife; it would be wrong, wicked. I should be doing you a great and terrible injury if I were to marry you!"

Rupert looked at her in astonishment.

"Explain, my darling! For Heaven's sake, explain yourself! What wrong, what injury could it do me? You are the one thing I long for—the crowning blessing of my life, Ina. What can you mean when you say you would be wronging me if you married me?"

"I cannot explain; my lips are sealed, Rupert," she sobbed. "Oh! you were right. I did love you—I do love you. If my refusal to be yours pains you, it pains me also—ah! how bitterly no one can tell; but yet I have no alternative left. I cannot marry you, Rupert."

"Heaven help us!" he cried, in desperation. "What can you mean, Ina? We love each other. You confess you love me, darling! If that be so, what can possibly hinder our marriage? You are of age; there can be no legal impediment. Again I entreat you to tell me what is this terrible secret?"

She shook her head sadly, trying to stifle her sobs.

"If I told you, Rupert, it would not smooth matters; nay, you would be the first to say I was right—to bid me adieu," she replied.

"Tell me, Ina," he said, suddenly, his face darkening, "did your father object to our marriage? I know he must have seen how I loved you. Did he forbid you to—"

"No, no! My dear father never mentioned your name to me. He loved you, Rupert; yet—I may tell you so much—it was a secret that he confided on his death-bed that makes me now tell you that I can never be your wife, nor the wife of any man."

Rupert started back, horror-struck.

"A secret the squire confided to you?" he said.

"Yes; and bade me never divulge it. Oh, do not urge me further, Rupert! Let us say farewell, for it must be so. I cannot marry you," she sighed, tears falling from her eyes again.

For a moment he was silent, and paced the floor uneasily.

"Ina," he said, at length, stopping in front of her, and holding out his hands to her, "believe me, no matter *what* the secret is, I love you for yourself alone, and pray you, under any circumstances, to be my wife. I will never inquire into this matter. I will never mention it again. I love you, and were you penniless—were you of no family—were you poor, despised, of no reputation—I would still implore you to be mine. Come to me, my love, and be at peace. Do not let this secret divide us."

He held out his arms to her as he spoke, and would fain have clasped her to his heart; but she shrunk away with a look of agony.

"It cannot be! It would be wicked, horrible; and sooner or later" (and she shuddered) "my secret will be known, and you—yes, even you—will say I was right, that I did my duty in refusing to marry you," she answered.

She spoke so solemnly and earnestly, with such pain in her voice, that even Rupert was silent, and at a loss how to answer her.

"Does any one know this secret besides you, Ina?" he said.

"Yes, one person; old Doctor Armstrong knew it, too," she answered.

"And the other person?" he asked.

"Oh, Rupert, do not question me!" she cried. "You must believe me when I tell you it cannot be."

"Another person besides yourself knows, and Doctor Armstrong knew," he said, meditatively. "Ina, I will find out the secret, and then I may be able to help you. Agnita knows."

"Agnita knows, but she will not tell you; and if she did, it would be useless," she replied.

"We shall see," he answered. "I have still hopes."

CHAPTER IX.

FOR HONOR'S SAKE.

"AGNITA knows; perhaps she will tell me," thought Rupert, as, crestfallen and miserable, he rode away from Thornhill. "She cannot be so cruel as to deny me her help now, when Ina's happiness and mine depend upon it. True, we have not always been on friendly terms,"—and Rupert's thoughts went back to the morning, a year ago now nearly, when Agnita had reproached him with his conduct to her, and vowed to be revenged; "but that is all over. She is married, and has forgotten all about that romantic attachment she said she entertained for me. She cannot be vindictive, as she then tried to make me believe. She will, surely, help me now?"

So musing, Rupert rode on to Rocklands, and was soon in the gorgeous drawing room, where Agnita, faultlessly attired, was sitting ready to receive her afternoon visitors.

She was not in a particularly gentle frame of mind that afternoon. She had had a long argument with her liege lord at luncheon about the before-mentioned house in Fifth avenue, and Mr. Lawson had obstinately refused to see its advantages over — street.

He preferred — street, he said; and as his first wife had insisted on his buying a house there, he didn't see why he should go to the trouble of giving it up and taking another; and at last Agnita, finding she could make no way, either by argument or by sarcastic remarks and angry looks, gave in, with a very undignified grace, it must be confessed. Not that she particularly minded living in — street, but that it gave her an unpleasant feeling of insecurity to be worsted in such a trifle.

She was looking gloomy and vexed as Rupert entered; but when she saw how downhearted and troubled he appeared, strange to say, her own countenance brightened, and she waited eagerly for what he had to say.

"I have come to you for help in a great trouble, Mrs. Lawson," he said. "I hope you will be my friend."

"Your friend," she replied, lightly. "Is it possible you can be in need of my friendship?"

"It is, indeed," he replied, gravely. "I have come to speak to you about Ina, seriously, Mrs. Lawson."

"Ina? Poor dear child! she is not ill, is she?" said Agnita, with well-feigned anxiety.

"She looks far from well, I grieve to say; but it is not of that I want to speak. You know my feelings toward her—you know my love for her, Mrs. Lawson."

"But I do not see what I have to do with

that. You told me before that Ina was cold to you. Can I make her love you?" replied Agnita, calmly.

"But she does love me!" cried Rupert; "she has told me so. And yet she will not marry me."

Agnita turned a shade paler at Rupert's last words; but as he finished her color came again, and a look of triumph filled her face, which she tried in vain to hide.

"She has given you her reasons, I suppose?" she said, coldly.

"That is just what she will not do. She tells me it is on account of some secret her father confided to her, and which you and she alone know. Mrs. Lawson, have pity on me. Tell me what it is; for, be it what it may, I will never rest till I have overcome the difficulty—the obstacle that separates us!"

"Why would not Ina tell you?" said Agnita, harshly. "Why should she try to put it off on me to—"

"Nay; she tells me her lips are sealed by a promise to her dead father," he answered.

"Poor child!—poor child!" said Agnita, in a tone of contemptuous pity. "That is an utter delusion, Mr. Beauchamp. She might not, perhaps, be justified in repeating to you *all* her father told her, but her reason for rejecting you need not be a secret; in fact, sooner or later, I fear, it will be manifested to every one! Poor child! she has done right to refuse you."

"Right, Mrs. Lawson?" he replied, in agonized tones.

"Perfectly right," replied Agnita, coldly. "Ina must never marry."

"In Heaven's name, why?" he cried again.

"Because"—and Agnita's brow darkened, and she spoke as if with difficulty—"her mother had madness in her family. She died mad when only a few years older than Ina is now. Strange, too, as it may seem to you, Ina has already shown signs of—"

"Stop, stop!" cried Rupert, in horror. "It cannot be true!—Ina, my beautiful, innocent darling! Mrs. Lawson, have you no pity? How can you tell me such a hideous tale?"

"Nay, you asked me; and it is well you should know the truth, Mr. Beauchamp. Ina has acted most honorably in refusing to marry you. She is not fit to become a wife. At any moment the hereditary taint—"

"Say no more—for Heaven's sake, say no more!" muttered Rupert, in an agony of grief. "I had sooner have heard of her death! This is too terrible!"

Mrs. Lawson's big black eyes were fixed on him, and something like a smile played on the full, red lips.

"Ah, I have foreseen this," she said, in a hard tone. "I knew the secret years ago—"

and, remember, I have told you only a part of it; but Ina knew nothing of it till her father died. The shock to her was dreadful. I warned you of this long ago, Mr. Beauchamp. Do you remember my once telling you that Ina would one day refuse to be your wife?"

Something in her words filled him with a sudden suspicion.

"Mrs. Lawson," he cried, "is what you have told me the sober truth, or—or are you playing with me? Are you trying to punish me for the supposed wrong I—"

"The supposed wrong? What wrong?" she said, looking at him scornfully. "Pshaw! do you suppose I think of *that* now? No; I am only too thankful you left me to myself, Mr. Beauchamp. I infinitely prefer Rocklands to the Lodge (though it is a pretty little place), and being Mrs. Lawson to being Mrs. Anybody. What I have told you is sober truth. If you tell Ina what I have told you, she will confirm my tale. It is impossible she could ever become your wife!"

Agnita seemed to take a cruel pleasure in repeating the words, and observing how Rupert writhed under them.

"I am sorry for her," she continued, after a pause, harshly and hurriedly; "but I am not sorry for *you*, Rupert Beauchamp. You had no pity for me in old days. You spared me not one pang. I loved you then, poor fool that I was, as much as I hate and despise you now; and I suffered, maybe, as bitterly as you suffer now, when I saw you day by day falling away from me, and then devoting yourself to another, unmindful of my misery. I have told you the truth, Mr. Beauchamp, and I have my revenge."

"You are cruel!" he cried. "I never injured you!"

She laughed bitterly.

"So you say. I am the best judge of that. If months and even years of silent misery are no injury, then you have inflicted none on me. If I am not miserable now, I owe it to myself, not to you. Now leave me, and save as the merest strangers, do not let us meet again. You can be nothing to Ina, and are less than nothing to me."

She pointed imperiously to the door.

"I leave you, Mrs. Lawson," he replied. "My misery is too great to let the sting of your taunts wound me very deeply. They are undeserved, and it is unwomanly of you to utter them. Do not fancy I shall again trouble you in my misfortunes. I shall bid adieu to Ina to-morrow, and at once leave the East for good."

"An excellent plan," she replied, coldly, though the color faded from her cheek. "You will doubtless return cured of your love. Men nowadays are not supposed to be patterns of

constancy; and it certainly is not one of your characteristics, as I know of old. Good-morning!"

And with a scornful bow, she turned away, without giving him her hand, and it was not till she heard him ride away from the door that she resumed her seat by the window.

Other visitors came in. Not a cloud was on Agnita's face. They found her charming; quite unusually gay and amusing. Even when Mr. Lawson entered she was all smiles, and he began to believe that, after all, he would be able to train her into submission to his will, and make her a patient, obedient wife.

Evidently she had forgotten all about their little argument at luncheon. Perhaps he had been too peremptory with her; but, after all, it had had a good effect.

Her docility, however, should be rewarded. There was a certain emerald and diamond pendant hidden away in his strong-box, which she knew nothing of. It should be hers.

And while the visitors were sipping their afternoon tea, and enjoying Mrs. Lawson's amusing conversation, her husband went into his study, disinterred the jewel and brought it down to the drawing-room, where somewhat ostentatiously he presented it to his wife.

She was charmed, of course, with the delicate attention, embraced Peter before her guests (which delighted him, for he dreaded that people should say she had married him for money, not for love), and the visitors departed, saying to themselves that, after all, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Lawson were a happy couple, and he the most generous of husbands. The match had turned out far more comfortable than they had ever imagined it would.

Rupert rode home in silent misery. All was explained now. Ina's changed manner, her endeavors to avoid him, her silence and coldness; the poor child had but been bravely doing her duty, and trying to crush back the love that she felt was hopeless.

"I will see her once more—only once," he resolved; "and then I will leave her and go forth into the world alone. Oh, my darling—my darling! how can I leave you in your trouble? And yet, by staying, I can only increase it. Yes, it will be better to part at once, and if it must be—forever!"

Rupert's preparations were soon made, and the next morning saw him again at Thornhill to bid Ina farewell.

A pained, agonized look passed over her face as he entered. She feared he had come to urge her to marry him—to take a step which her conscience told her was wrong; but his first words undeceived her.

"I have come to wish you good-by, Ina," he said, in a sad voice, that went to her heart.

"You are leaving the Lodge, then?" she said, her heart growing cold.

"Yes; I am going away, perhaps for some time," he answered. "I have thought of what you said, Ina, yesterday, and—"

"You trust me, and forgive me! Rupert, is it not so?" she said, feeling that he meant this farewell to be a final one.

"Yes, you are right," he said, in a slow, toneless voice. "I shall never love another, Ina; but, my darling, I know now you are right."

"You know—all?" she said, shuddering. "Has Agnita told you?"

"She told me your reason," he replied.

"And—and my poor mother's fate?" she whispered.

"No—what—ah! she told me there was more to tell—that she had only told me half the secret. But—but I can guess the rest; do not repeat it to me," he answered, turning pale. "God bless and keep you, my darling!"

He took her in his arms, and kissed her tenderly, and for a moment she lay with her little fair head on his breast, without a word. At length she disengaged herself from his embrace.

"Good-by!" she whispered. "In another world this may be set right, Rupert, though never here. Good-by, my love, forever!"

One more kiss and he was gone, and Ina felt that forevermore she was alone; and sinking on her knees she wept bitterly.

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE SUSPICION.

Two years passed and still the Lodge was vacant. Rupert Beauchamp had never returned to it; his friends had heard of him first from one place, then from another. He was apparently wandering about aimlessly over the continent, and had no thought or intention of settling down again quietly at home.

At Thornhill there were very few changes. Ina led a quiet, secluded life, with Mrs. Garnet as her companion. She had grown stronger in health, and from a fragile-looking girl had developed into a slim, graceful woman, with a grave, sweet face and a gentle mien. A little old for her years, perhaps, and not caring as much for the world and society as the mistress of a large estate should (at least, so some people thought), but yet loved and esteemed by all who knew her.

When Rupert left her she set herself steadily to fight against her sorrow, and after a long and bitter struggle had succeeded in regaining her peace of mind. Not that she ceased to love him—she loved him as much as ever; but as she might have loved the memory of a dead brother. She had no hope, and tried to look back on their love as a thing of the past.

She lived a strangely solitary existence at first, opening her heart and telling her grief to no one. Only to Agnita, on one or two occa-

sions, did she allude to what had taken place.

"Agnita," she had said one day, suddenly, to her cousin, when she had ridden over one bleak November evening to see her, "can you tell me which of mother's relations it was who was afflicted with this dreadful malady?"

Agnita started violently.

"Why, child, how you brood over that misfortune!" she said. "It is bad for you, Ina."

"I don't brood over it, dear—at least, I think not; but I happened to be looking through our family record yesterday, and my mother seems to have had very few relatives for some time back. Her father was killed from a fall from his horse, and her only brother was drowned at sea; her grandfather was killed in the war of the Revolution; and his father, years before, in England."

"I don't know—I can't tell you; your father didn't mention which of her family," faltered Agnita.

"It must have been her mother's family, I suppose. But I can remember my grandmother, and she did not die mad." And Ina shuddered.

"Don't think about it, Ina," said Agnita, angrily, starting up. "You make my blood run cold. It was some one or the other of the family—I can't tell who; but what does it matter? I tell you it is very bad for you to brood over it."

Ina sighed and was silent; but the desire to find out the full particulars of the terrible malady her family was afflicted with was anything but extinguished by Agnita's petulance.

"It's no use asking her about it, I fear; and perhaps she really doesn't know. She seems put out to-night," thought Ina, as she noted the dark cloud on Agnita's brow. "I hope she and Mr. Lawson have not been disagreeing again.—How is your husband, Agnita?" she added.

"Oh, don't mention him! Odiously cross, of course. He wanted to drag me to the seashore now—in the middle of November; only think of that! But I utterly refused to stir, so he went off this morning, as sulky as a bear, leaving me with only a few dollars in my pocket. He's turning out a regular miser, Ina."

"Is he? I should hardly have thought it," said Ina, smiling, as she glanced at Agnita's costly dress and jewel bedecked hands.

"He is, though. He positively grudged me a miserable fifty dollars for Melaine, the other day, and told me I squandered his money; and he's rich, Ina—oh, richer than any one imagines. It's a positive shame!"

And these complaints of her husband's parsimoniousness were ever on Agnita's lips; and, indeed, in many ways he held a restraining hand over her, and would not allow her to

lavish his wealth in the manner she had anticipated—requiring from her, moreover, a strict account of everything she spent.

"You are late, my dear," said Mrs. Garnet, as Ina rode up to Thornhill. "I hope you won't be put out, my dear, but a very old friend of mine came over from Limehouse to see me to-day, and I have asked her to stay the evening. She is anxious to see you, for she says she knew your mother's family well in her youth."

"Indeed! The Howards or the Danes?" asked Ina, anxiously.

"The Danes. Your grandmother and she were intimate friends, she tells me. I had no idea of it till to-day. You won't mind my having kept her?" said Mrs. Garnet.

"On the contrary, I shall be delighted to make her acquaintance," answered Ina.

Mrs. Maxwell was a grave, handsome woman, between sixty and seventy years of age, and Ina took to her the moment she set eyes on her, and the talk soon turned on the Danes and their relations.

"A finer family I never knew," said Mrs. Maxwell; "all clever, brave, and good. Your grandmother was the only daughter, and your mother was her only daughter, my dear. Her brother—your great-uncle—was killed in a naval engagement; it was a great shock to his father and mother, who were aged people."

"And how did they die?" asked Ina, with breathless interest.

"The old gentleman, dropped off during his sleep, at the age of eighty," she replied; "and I had the privilege of being with Mrs. Dane during her last illness. I and your grandmother—mere girls we were then—nursed her. A more peaceful death I never saw."

"And—and there was no—no madness in the family then?" whispered Ina.

"Madness, my dear? Certainly not! What put such an idea in your head?" cried Mrs. Maxwell, while Mrs. Garnet looked up in astonishment.

"Then was it on the—on the Howards' side?" she said.

"Certainly not! I knew the Howards, too, very well. Dear me, Miss Thornhill, are you ill?"—for Ina had turned pale.

"No," she faltered; "but are you sure of what you tell me?"

"Most certainly," replied Mrs. Maxwell, unable to overcome her astonishment. "If anyone has been telling you such tales, believe me they are but idle gossip."

"Can she be right? Then what could Agnita mean?" thought Ina, as she tossed restlessly that night on her sleepless pillow. "She said that my dear father told her it was in the family. Can she be wrong or have mistaken him?"

It set her thinking, and she resolved to inquire more minutely into her family history, and to look through the papers her father had left behind—a task she had hitherto, spite of the two years that had passed since his death, shrunk from. It was a task that reopened many an old wound, and made her recent sorrows come back afresh to her, but she pursued it steadily, and in vain she sought for any confirmation of the tale Agnita had told her.

There were bundles of old letters in her father's desk received at various times from her mother, all tied up and docketed neatly. She read those received during a short absence of her mother from home but a few weeks previous to her death; but they let in no light on the subject, only showing her how strong was the love and sympathy that had subsisted between her parents.

At length a small book, bound in morocco leather, caught her eye, hidden away in a corner of the desk. It was a diary, and the date of the year was the same as that in which her mother's death occurred. She trembled as she turned over the leaves. January, February, March—only entries of a commonplace character.

"April 16.—Mary taken ill."

Then a wide gap; the rest of the pages for the month had been torn out, and the book contained no further entry.

This confirmed all her fears. The motive for the destruction of the written pages seemed clear enough, and she sighed deeply as she put the book back in its place.

A packet of memoranda next attracted her attention. In it she found an unfinished letter, addressed, as it seemed to her, to a dear friend, which puzzled her as much as it interested her.

It had been written by her father shortly after her mother's death, and was full of remorse and self-upbraiding for some terrible mistake—some fearful error he had committed; but just as Ina, with trembling hands and fast-beating heart, believed the mystery was about to be explained, and with difficulty turned over the page of the letter, she found all her hopes disappointed—the opened page was a blank!

What could it all mean? She could not divine. Of what did her father accuse himself? What was the ill he had done, and for which he reproached himself so bitterly? Alas! she could not tell; and, utterly puzzled and bewildered, she shut up the desk, put it back in its place, and continued her search elsewhere.

Her mother's correspondence revealed nothing.

"To whom could that letter of my father's have been addressed?" thought Ina, suddenly, "Agnita said that no one but my aunt, herself, and Doctor Armstrong knew the particulars of

my mother's death: but some other person must have. That letter was not addressed to any one of them, and it is evidently not the first that my father wrote to his friend on the subject. If I could only find out who that friend was, I could learn all I wish to know."

She mused deeply for some time.

"Is it possible?" she thought at last, with a start. "Could it be Mr. Thynne to whom my father wrote? He was his great friend, I know, though he was a younger man by several years than my father. Where is he, I wonder? At least I might write and ask him."

She was about to take up her pen to begin a letter to her old friend, when she remembered that it was some months since she had heard of him, and that she did not even know his present address. Her heart smote her.

"My troubles have made me selfish, I fear," she sighed. "I have left Mr. Thynne's last letter unanswered for many months. Mr. Weston, the new rector, may know his address. I will walk across into the village and ask him."

Next morning she did so, and met Mr. Weston just as he was leaving the Rectory.

"You want Mr. Thynne's address, Miss Thornhill," he said. "Well, by good luck I can let you have it, for I heard from him only yesterday. He seems to like the West by the way he writes; and yet I should say he has at times a strong desire to visit his native home. He seems to be looking forward very much to meeting an old Richfield friend—you must know him well, I fancy—Mr. Beauchamp, of the Lodge?"

How strange it seemed to Ina to hear that name mentioned so indifferently! A slight flush rose to her pale cheeks as she replied, "Yes, he was an old friend of ours; but he has been away for two years, and I have heard very little of him during that time. Does Mr. Beauchamp talk of returning?"

"He does not say so. Here is Mr. Thynne's address, Miss Thornhill," and he wrote the address on a card, and gave it to her. "I wish he would return, though, for the good of the place. Good-by, Miss Thornhill; my compliments to Mrs. Garnet."

And Mr. Weston bowed, and walked off toward the village.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

THE two years that had passed so calmly—almost painfully calmly for Ina—Rupert Beauchamp had spent partly in the South and partly in the West. He had tried unsuccessfully to forget Ina, and to bow with submission to his fate; but the task was too hard for

him—he could not do it; and day by day his love for her grew stronger, try as he would to overcome it.

He grew very weary of his wandering life, and would fain have returned home; but he felt that to be near Ina, and yet to be almost as a stranger to her, was too much for him to bear, and that for the present his only safety was in keeping away from her.

He received with avidity any little scraps of news that reached him from home. A few friends he had about Richfield, who occasionally wrote to him, and their letters were the bright spots in his life. Judge, then, of his delight when he heard that his old friend the rector, Mr. Thynne, was at Denver, not a week's journey from where he was then staying.

I must go and see him at once. What a blessing it will be to catch sight of a familiar face! He will, in all probability, have later and more detailed accounts of the folks at home than I have. Perhaps he may even have had a letter from Ina; he was such a friend of the squire's, she may have written to him."

In less than a fortnight after he had heard of Mr. Thynne's presence in Denver, he was in that city.

"It does me good to see you again, Thynne," he said, shaking his old friend's hand heartily. "It is long since we met, and my wanderings seem to make it appear longer. What news have you from home?"

"None very recent," he replied, with a pleasant smile. "I have few correspondents at Richfield. Weston writes sometimes, but tells me little news. By the way, he told me in his last that he had seen Miss Thornhill, and that she had asked for my address. I have, therefore, been half-hoping for a letter from her; but it has not come."

"And how was she?" asked Rupert, eagerly.

"Why, have not you heard?" said the rector, with a puzzled look. "To tell you the truth, Beauchamp, I expected to get all the Richfield news from you."

A look of such deep pain crossed Rupert's brow that Mr. Thynne felt at once that there was something wrong.

"Miss Thornhill and I do not correspond, Thynne," he replied. "Nay, do not mistake me; we are good friends, but we thought—we agreed not to write. Ah, Thynne, many things have happened since the good squire's death, that perhaps you are ignorant of! I have many things to talk to you about."

Mr. Thynne looked agitated and surprised.

"This evening, after dinner, we can have a long talk, Beauchamp. Come in now and rest, and see your room. Dinner will be ready soon; you must be tired and hungry after your journey."

"And now for our talk," said Mr. Thynne, after dinner was over, lighting his cigar and settling himself for a long conversation. "What made you leave Richfield, and what is keeping you away, Beauchamp?"

"Ah, you have gone to the root of the matter at once, Thynne!" he replied. "What drove me away was a secret—a terrible secret the squire imparted to his daughter on his death-bed, and which, had it not been for Agnita—Mrs. Lawson, you know she is now—I should never have known. Indeed, I am not sure I have heard the whole of it now; but what I do know is enough. You are aware how I loved Ina? I asked her to be my wife, and she refused; and when I learned what it was that made her refuse, I was obliged to own that she was right, and so I came away, and till I can get over it I don't intend to go back."

Mr. Thynne had listened to his friend's story with ever-increasing surprise.

"I am utterly puzzled," he said. "I know there was a secret that weighed very heavily on the old squire's mind, Beauchamp. I knew it, and I often told him he was wrong to take it so much to heart—that he was not to blame."

"No, he was not to blame. Of course he did not know it, Thynne. But, oh, it is terrible—terrible!"

And Rupert hid his face in his hands.

"It was very terrible—very sad," continued Mr. Thynne; "and he thought it a duty to tell it to his daughter, though he shrunk from doing so. But I often told him it would be far better to let it die with him."

"I don't agree with with you there. Ina is right, I believe," replied Rupert, mournfully.

"I cannot say that I think it a sufficient reason for her refusal," replied Thynne, looking puzzled again. "Did Mrs. Lawson think so?"

"Oh, yes; she quite agreed with Ina!" answered Rupert.

"Strange!" murmured Mr. Thynne. "The news of Miss Elverson's marriage has surprised me a little. She was not particularly partial to Mr. Lawson when I was at home. You were the favored one, I think, Rupert, though, of course, I soon saw she had little chance with you."

"No; I do not care for Mrs. Lawson," replied Beauchamp, thoughtfully. "Tell me, Thynne, do you think her trustworthy?"

"I have never had any reason to think her the contrary," replied Mr. Thynne; "but I never admired her character. Beautiful she was—very beautiful; but there was something about her that always repelled me, nevertheless."

"Yes, just so," returned Beauchamp; "and yet, Thynne, when she first came to Thornhill, I nearly made a fatal mistake, but some

little thing showed me my error and I stopped in time. But I don't think she has ever forgiven me. She was glad—yes, positively delighted to see how I suffered when Ina refused me."

"That is what I cannot understand," said Thynne. "I wish I had been at Richfield and you had made me your confidant, instead of Miss Elverson—Mrs. Lawson, I mean."

"What could you have said or done, my dear fellow?" replied Rupert, sadly. "Nothing could alter the state of the case."

"I think I could have persuaded Miss Thornhill to look at it more reasonably," he answered; "but it is getting late, Beauchamp, and you must be tired. Let us be off to bed."

Several days passed and no more was said about the squire's secret, though the talk often turned on Richfield and old days, and Ina was more often present to the thoughts of the two men than usual, but they mutually avoided the subject, and it was not till the arrival of an eastern mail that they spoke of it again.

"Eastern letters!" cried Mr. Thynne, "and as I live, the letter Mr. Weston hinted I might expect from Miss Thornhill!"

"Is it?" cried Rupert, his heart beating hard. "Well, read it, old fellow, and then you can tell me all the news."

His eyes lingered for a moment lovingly on the familiar handwriting as Mr. Thynne tore open the letter, and then he left the room.

Before many moments had passed, he heard Mr. Thynne's voice calling him in accents of mingled horror, anger and agitation:

"Rupert, what is this? What does she mean? Is she the victim of a delusion, or have you and she been made miserable by a cruel falsehood? See here! What does she mean by this?"

And with an excited face, Mr. Thynne put Ina's letter into Rupert's hands, who read it eagerly where the rector pointed.

"I want to know, in plain words, Mr. Thynne—for a doubt has now for the first time entered my mind as to the truth of what has been told me—whether my poor mother was really insane at the time of her death, and took her own life?"

"Who could have told her such a wicked lie?" cried Mr. Thynne.

"What! is it false, then?" exclaimed Rupert. "There is no madness, no hereditary taint in her family?"

"None—none whatever. Her mother was as sane as you and I, and though there is a mystery about her death, which, as I remember once long ago telling you I was under a promise not to reveal—at any rate, while the squire lived—that tale is false."

"Thank Heaven! oh, thank Heaven!" cried Rupert, fervently. "That was the secret that divided us, Thynne; and that, since it was told

her, has made my poor Ina's life a hopeless wilderness to her."

"But you said the squire told her. I cannot understand it. But let us read on. Perhaps the letter may explain."

And he read:

"My father, I must tell you, could never summon up courage to tell me the dreadful fate of my dear mother, nor the cloud that hangs over my life. He bade Agnita do so with his last breath, and desired me never to divulge the secret. But a letter half finished, which I am certain was intended for you, that I have lately found in his desk, shows me you, too, know the secret; and yet, at the same time, this very letter makes me often doubt the accuracy of what Agnita related to me. Do not think hardly of me for doubting her, Mr. Thynne. I have suffered so terribly, I feel I must know the exact truth."

"Ah, Agnita—the tale was of her manufacturing, then! She did it out of revenge. I see it all now. Good heavens! can there really be such fiends in woman's shape? She never forgave me for not loving her, Thynne; and one day, in her anger, she reproached me with misleading and deceiving her, and vowed to be revenged. *She has done this!*"

"Yes—yes; it must be so, I fear, though I can hardly realize such wickedness in a woman like Mrs. Lawson. And she knew the truth—the real secret!" he replied, in amazement.

"The real secret! What was it?" said Rupert, uneasily.

"Nothing that need separate you and Miss Thornhill, though it is a miserable tale, too. I will tell it to you, and then you will see why I was surprised when you said it had parted you."

"And you are sure this dreaded malady was not in Mrs. Thornhill's family, as that woman told Ina?" cried Rupert.

"Sure—as sure as I stand here. Neither the Howards or the Danes showed a trace of such a thing. It existed only in the fertile and vindictive imagination of Mrs. Lawson.

"Mrs. Thornhill was taken ill when Ina was about three years old with a sudden and severe attack, of which the doctors could make nothing. She suffered paroxysms of intense pain, and between times would lie exhausted and almost senseless, and very soon all hopes of recovery were given over.

"I was constantly in the house and visited the sick-room at least twice every day, for Mrs. Thornhill was a truly religious woman; my ministrations were a comfort to her, and my company a comfort to the squire, who was wild with grief.

"A celebrated doctor was at length summoned from New York to consult with old Armstrong.

"As soon as he saw Mrs. Thornhill, he pronounced her case hopeless. She might live some days or even weeks; but of her ultimate

recovery he gave no hopes, and it was evident he considered that the end might be soon. All he could do was to prescribe a drug to ease the violence of the pain, and take his fee.

"I need not describe the good squire's grief. From the moment the great doctor left the house he never quitted his wife's bedside, and all the food and medicine she took was administered by him.

"One night—I was in the house, and within call of the sick-room—the fits of pain recommenced with increased violence. The medicine Doctor G—— had prescribed, which he warned us was of a very powerful nature, stood ready on the table by the bedside for any emergency.

"The squire took the bottle, opened it, and pouring out some of the contents, administered it to his wife.

"The effects were almost instantaneous. The pain was lulled, and after feebly whispering her thanks to the squire, Mrs. Thornhill sunk into a deep sleep.

"She never woke again.

"The sun rose and shone into the room, and she neither spoke nor stirred.

"The squire, fearing to rouse her, sat silently by the bed till the nurse entered and drew aside the curtain.

"Then I heard a terrible cry, and entering, I found the squire wildly adjuring her to wake, to speak to him; but her lips were closed forever. She had passed away to another world.

"The bottle of medicine was on the table where the squire had left it.

"Suddenly he turned toward it, and clutched it in his trembling hands, with a fearful look I shall never forget.

"Two doses were gone.

"*"I have killed her!"* he muttered; and fell to the floor at my feet.

"*That* was the poor squire's secret, Rupert; not the tale Mrs. Lawson wickedly told you.

"The squire had given his wife an over dose of the strong narcotic, and she never woke again. His grief and remorse were terrible, and, as you know, he was never the same man again.

"We hushed the matter up, and beyond myself and Mrs. Elverson and the old housekeeper, who died, as I heard, a few months after the squire, I don't believe any one had an idea of it, not even old Doctor Armstrong. It was very sudden, certainly; but that did not surprise many people, and the squire's known devotion to his wife fully accounted for his excessive grief and the solitary life he led at Thornhill for some years after. It must have been from Mrs. Elverson that Mrs. Lawson heard the story, for which she so craftily and wickedly substituted that horrible tale of her own fabrication."

"Thank God, I have found it out in time! Thynne, you have saved me from life-long misery. I can never be grateful enough to you," he cried, starting up. "Now tell me, when does the Eastern Express leave here?"

"At ten P. M. Will you go home in it, Beauchamp?" he replied.

"Yes. And you?" said Rupert.

"I'll accompany you," he replied.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WRONG RIGHTED.

SWIFTLY as sped the express over the continent, the five days passed seemed unending to Rupert. He paced the car restlessly for hours at a time; inquired constantly what number of miles the train was making, so that even Mr. Thynne, who knew his anxieties and his motives for wishing to be at once in New York, was amused.

But the longest day must have an end, and Rupert and his friend were soon nearing their destination.

"Impossible to reach Richfield to-night, I fear," said Rupert.

"Quite," replied Mr. Thynne, smiling, "unless you travel on till twelve o'clock without stopping, in which case I fear you would have to proceed alone; but, believe me, a good night's rest in town will be an excellent thing for us both, and to-morrow we can go on to Richfield."

"Yes; by the 9:5 train, and so shall get to Thornhill before twelve," he replied. "Somehow I have become dreadfully nervous and fanciful, Thynne. It seems impossible that I shall really find Ina at the end of my journey, and find her to part with her no more. I feel as if when we reached Thornhill we shall find some new and unexpected event has occurred, and that all my hopes will be dashed to the ground."

Nothing out of the usual quiet way had, however, happened at Richfield when Rupert and Mr. Thynne got out of the train at the little station next morning. Ina had risen as usual, and after seeing to her ordinary household affairs and paying a visit to the garden, had retired to her morning-room, and taken up the paper.

"I wonder if Mr. Thynne has got my letter," she thought, "and if this mail will bring me an answer? It is just twelve days since I wrote. Perhaps I made a mistake in writing, and he can tell me nothing I do not know already."

Her beautiful face became clouded with sad thoughts as she mused.

"I must not give way like this," she said in low tones to herself, trying to shake off her melancholy. "While I have time, and can do it, let me employ myself usefully. Such a

glorious day as this was not made to mope and pine in."

She walked toward the open window as she spoke, and started as she saw a tall figure approach it from without.

"Mr. Thynne!" she cried, surprise and pleasure in her voice; "is it really you?"

"Yes; it is I!" he answered, pressing her trembling little hand. "And I am not alone, Miss Thornhill. I have brought an old friend with me, and we have news—good news—for you. Don't tremble and turn so pale, my dear young lady. You have gone through a hard trial, but Rupert and I—"

"Rupert! Mr. Beauchamp!" she faltered. "Is he here? Oh, I cannot, must not see him!"

"Yes; you can, you must, Ina, my love, my wife, for there is no reason why you should not be mine now, darling!" he cried, starting forward, and clasping her in his arms. "It was all a falsehood—a cruel falsehood—which separated us, dear! Mr. Thynne knows all, and will tell you so."

"Yes, dear Miss Thornhill," said the rector, taking her hand as she sunk, overcome by the suddenness of the shock, into a chair. "The terrible tale of your dear mother's insanity that was told you is all untrue. Thank Heaven, I have your good father's letters, written to me after and at the time of her death, to prove the truth of my words. The secret your father wished to confide to you was of a different nature; and I, as one of the persons who was in his confidence—the one person beside your aunt, I may say—can tell it you."

And seating himself beside her, Mr. Thynne related to her the sad story of her mother's death.

She wept silently, her hand in Rupert's while he spoke.

"My poor father!" she said; "but, oh! how could Agnita have deceived us so? Why did she hate me—I, who loved her?"

"Why did she hate you?" cried a voice from behind them, which made them start. "I will tell you, Ina Thornhill."

And Mrs. Lawson stepped from the garden into the room.

Mr. Thynne and Rupert bowed to her, with quiet scorn in the one case, mixed in the other with bitter indignation.

"Ah! I see you have discovered the trick I played you," she said, with a harsh laugh; "and you, you poor innocent" (and she looked with contempt at Ina as she spoke), "want to know why I did it! Well, I despise myself now for taking the trouble; but years ago I loved that man,"—and she pointed to Rupert. "I loved him, and strove hard to win his love. I thought I had succeeded, and then he suddenly left me; and when he returned, and you

came to this house, I soon found it was only for you he cared. It drove me wild at the time—how wild I can hardly believe, now that I can look at him with such indifference; and I resolved at all hazards to separate him from you, and I succeeded. My tale was well told, well planned, and appeared genuine. It deceived you both admirably. I didn't reckon on your being made a confidant of, Mr. Thynne. Ha, ha!"

Mr. Thynne bowed without replying; but the scorn expressed on his face was so strong, that even Agnita was stung by it.

She flushed crimson, and for a moment her eyes fell; but in another she resumed her former defiant bearing.

"Well, I suppose I may go now. Set your mind at rest, Ina, and grow well and happy again. I wish you joy of your lover, and much happiness in your married life. I called to tell you we are off for New Orleans tomorrow, so I don't suppose we shall meet for some time to come. Mr. Lawson has a whim in his head that he ought to be better acquainted with the South. I shall be no loss at your wedding, I dare say. Good-by!"

And she left the room by the window.

"Agnita, Agnita!" cried Ina, starting up. But Agnita did not heed her.

With a heart full of baffled vengeance and bitterness, she returned to her home, and without telling Mr. Lawson of the return of Mr. Beauchamp and his friends, she started with him next day on their southern trip.

"I never saw you so cross-grained and provoking before, Agnita!" said Mr. Lawson, as they stepped on board the coast steamer that was to carry them. "Traveling with you is quite a penance. I little thought, when I married you, that you had such a temper. Now I tell you what, my dear. We have half an hour yet before the steamer starts. If you think it probable you will remain in your present frame of mind for long, just return to the hotel, and I will go on alone; if not, for goodness sake cease nagging! You are worse, by far, than my first wife was when you once begin, though she was only a factory girl, as you so often remind me."

"I am going into the ladies' cabin at once, Mr. Lawson," replied his wife, coldly. "I have, I assure you, no wish to talk to you."

And Agnita retired below with dignity, but her husband's remark bore fruit. She was not anxious to be sent back to Rocklands in disgrace just now, and be forced to be a spectator of Ina's happiness; and knowing Mr. Lawson was quite capable of carrying his threat into execution if she exasperated him, she stifled her wrath, and for the rest of the journey, if not a pleasant, was at any rate a civil-spoken companion.

The news of Mr. Beauchamp's return soon spread abroad, and poor Mr. Weston was rather taken aback by the sudden appearance of the rector. Mr. Thynne assured him, however, that he was only going to stay till Miss Thornhill and Mr. Beauchamp were married, and had no intention of disturbing him in the snug Rectory. At first, Ina could hardly believe in her own happiness; the change from grief to joy, from a brooding terror to peace and security, had been so sudden.

Rupert was with her, never to leave her again. The black phantom that had made her life for the last two years so terrible to her had fled away. All before her was bright and joyful; only the remembrance of Agnita's perfidy came to trouble her.

"I pity her—I cannot help pitying her," she said one day to Rupert. "Fancy losing you, darling! If she loved you she must have suffered terribly."

"Not as we—as you have suffered these two years, love," he replied, sternly. "I shall try to forgive her, Ina, but it will be hard."

"I am glad, at any rate, she is not going to be here on the 8th, dear—it would have been painful to all of us; but I pity her, Rupert. I am so happy now, that I pity every one who is not happy; and Agnita is not—I have been sure of that for a long time past. Mr. Lawson is not a bad sort of a man, but he and Agnita don't get on, and she does not try to hide her indifference to him. He would be far less disagreeable if she studied his wishes and comfort a little more, and thought less of herself."

"Yes; that has always been her stumbling-block—self," he answered.

The 8th of June arrived, and Ina awoke to find that it was her wedding morning.

With the aid of her four bonny bridesmaids she was soon attired in her spotless white robe and veil of costly lace, looking as fair and pure and innocent as a child.

The wedding bells chimed forth a merry peal as Ina walked down the aisle on her husband's arm, and across the churchyard, strewn thickly with flowers, to her carriage; and Mr.

Thynne, with a tear in his eye, laid down the book out of which he had read the service, and put off his surplice in the vestry.

"At any rate, she is happy, and he is worthy of her," he said. "Heaven bless them! He will make her happier than I ever could have done, even if she had loved me."

An hour or two later the newly-married couple had driven off on their wedding tour, and Thornhill was empty of guests; only Mrs. Garnet and her friend Mrs. Maxwell were left in it of all the party that had sat down to breakfast that morning.

"Who could have put that curious idea of madness into her head?" said Mrs. Maxwell that evening.

Mrs. Garnet pursed up her mouth.

"I've a shrewd idea, my love, but I don't like to say what I think," she replied.

"Hum! I never did like Mrs. Lawson, Janet," said the other.

"Nor I," replied Mrs. Garnet, demurely. "Shall we go to bed now, Kate?"

"Yes, certainly. I see we agree in our ideas; but you are right—it is better to keep them to ourselves."

And Mrs. Maxwell followed Mrs. Garnet up-stairs.

Mrs. Lawson and Ina were not, however, destined to see much of each other for some years to come, for they heard that Mr. Lawson, who was still away with his wife, had suddenly resolved on letting Rocklands for some years; and before many months were over a new family took possession of it.

Ten years later Agnita, then a widow, returned to live in it alone. But she is cross-grained and capricious; has few friends and many enemies; hates Rocklands; and even when the Beauchamps and their four beautiful children come down to spend their summers at Thornhill, she often leaves it to go abroad.

"She can't forget what has happened, I fear," says Ina, sadly. "But we have forgiven it, haven't we, Rupert?"

"Yes, darling," he replies; "but I fancy remorse for that cruel falsehood will always torment Agnita."

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